

Florida State University Libraries

Electronic Theses, Treatises and Dissertations

The Graduate School

Is IB for Me? : Minority Student Enrollment Decisions in an International Baccalaureate Program

Lashanda D. Allen

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

IS IB FOR ME?

MINORITY STUDENT ENROLLMENT DECISIONS IN AN INTERNATIONAL
BACCALAUREATE PROGRAM

By

LASHANDA D. ALLEN

A Dissertation submitted to the
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

2021

LaShanda D. Allen defended this dissertation on March 31, 2021.

The members of the supervisory committee were:

Ayesha Khurshid
Professor Directing Dissertation

Stephen McDowell
University Representative

Bradley Cox
Committee Member

Stephanie Zuilkowski
Committee Member

The Graduate School has verified and approved the above-named committee members, and certifies that the dissertation has been approved in accordance with university requirements.

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughters, Alanah and Jaiya. You are beautiful and strong.

You are the light of the world. You give me purpose and hope. Thank you for your encouragement and understanding as I went through this process. It is my sincerest desire to have provided you with an example of perseverance and love that you can be proud of, just as I am so very proud of you both. I love you with all that I am.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to give thanks to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I am grateful for his grace and mercy and for carrying me the entirety of my life, even when I didn't know it. Everything in my life is possible because of the love of God. It is with this awareness that I know that I am not responsible for my own achievements but understand that they are instead a result of the collective efforts of a number of people throughout my entire life that have been strategically placed by God.

Thank you to my family, who has seen God's light in me my entire life. They have always believed in me and what I might become. To have this confidence throughout my life has been a gift that has carried me through many challenges. A special thank you is due to my mother. Her selflessness and sacrifice have always motivated me to do my best. Her love and support when I have faltered have helped me to grow. Thank you to my daughters, Alanah and Jaiya. Being their mother and watching them grow has been my life's joy. Through them, I have learned what it means to love. They have motivated me to aspire to be more and to fight harder. It is this fight and determination that has helped me to complete this dissertation. Thank you to my friend, Latoya Pratt. I would not have made it through college without her love and support. She stepped in to help me mother my girls when I needed her. Our bond is everlasting. In speaking of my family, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge my Harmony church family and adopted family, the Williams'. They opened their hearts to me when I was a young single mother in a strange city. They have always encouraged and supported me and my girls. Their love and inclusion gave us a second family. I love them dearly.

There have been a number of influential people outside of my family who have and will continue to have lasting effects on my life, both personally and professionally. Thank you to my

former teacher and now colleague, Karen T. Brown. Mrs. Brown, who not only submitted a letter in support of my acceptance to this program but who has provided support and encouragement since I was 14 years old. Throughout every stage of my life, since high school, she has been there, ready to cheer me on and providing any help that I may have needed. She has gone above and beyond anything that I ever expected, and I am eternally grateful.

My professional journey has led to the development of life-long friendships. The greatest of which was developed with my mentor and my friend, Dr. Royce Turner. Dr. Turner has been a constant source of wisdom throughout my professional career. He has given me professional opportunities that have helped me grow and made way for me to cultivate opportunities on my own. He taught me the importance of being a servant leader by his own example. Most importantly, he let me know that it was important to continue to be true to who I am. He believed in me even when I didn't always believe in myself. He invested in me as a person. His influence on my life is immense and indescribable. I am forever indebted to him. He has my sincerest gratitude, always.

There are a number of other professional colleagues who have supported me in my educational journey. When people are willing to put their name on the line for you, it is a sincere demonstration of confidence. Thank you to Karen T. Brown, Brian Lyons, Dr. Royce Turner, Pamela Stewart, and Frank Watkins for trusting me with their good names and submitting their support to my pursuit of this degree. I hope that my work makes them proud. Thank you also to all of my colleagues and friends who have expressed their belief in me throughout this process. There were times when I did not feel I could make it, but they never doubted me. Those small moments of encouragement and faith are etched in my memories.

It would not have been possible to complete this journey without the support of my major professor, Dr. Ayesha Khurshid. Her calm and sincere disposition often worked to put me at ease and assure me of my abilities while also pushing me to give more. Thank you for the many hours you have spent helping me to make this work the best representation of who I am and what I want to say. Your support and guidance throughout this process have been invaluable. Thank you to the members of my committee, Drs. Cox, Zuilkowski, and McDowell. Thank you for the time and care that you have given to make sure that I have presented my best work.

The collective contributions of the many people in my life make me consider Luke 12:48, which states, “To whom much is given, much is required.” I have indeed been blessed beyond measure. It is my hope that this dissertation serves as a suitable reflection of the efforts of the many who have given to and for me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables	viii
Abstract	ix
1. PROBLEM OF PRACTICE, PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTION	1
2. BACKGROUND ANALYSIS.....	10
3. INVESTIGATIVE APPROACH.....	29
4. FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND DISSEMINATION PLAN..	44
APPENDICES	90
A. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	90
B. INFORMED CONSENT AND STUDENT ASSENT	93
C. IRB APPROVAL.....	103
References.....	105
Biographical Sketch	109

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.	A Priori Codes.....	39
Table 2.	Group 1: Students Who Applied For and Are Participating in the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program at Magnet High School	46
Table 3.	Group 2: Students Who Were Eligible but Did Not Apply for the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program at Magnet High School	46

ABSTRACT

Access to a high-quality curriculum through acceleration/college preparatory programs is essential to student success in their postsecondary education and opportunities. However, African-American and Hispanic minority students are disproportionately underrepresented in these programs. These lower rates of participation have the potential to impact postsecondary outcomes. This exploratory study seeks to understand, from students' perspective, how they make decisions to participate in one such program, the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program (DP). In this study, two student focus groups of six-members of African American and Hispanic participants were chosen using a purposive convenience sampling. One focus group consisted of students who applied and were accepted to the program, while the second focus group declined to apply. A total of six individual parent interviews, three parents representing each focus group, were employed to provide additional data and background to understand the student interview data better.

The findings reveal that there were four primary themes by which students and families based their decision-making. These themes included workload and stress, social relationships, family influence, and access to information. These factors worked in concert to frame student and parent beliefs regarding the IBDP. While students and families in both groups saw the same factors as important, they came to differing conclusions regarding enrollment based on their social and cultural contexts. The social and cultural contexts of students and parents strongly influence how they process this information. Understanding this context's influences is essential to increasing minority student enrollment in the IBDP.

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM OF PRACTICE, PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTION

Minority students in the United States public education system struggle to find their voice and where they belong (Uwah et al., 2008). Our public schools are places that cater to the culture of middle-class Caucasian Americans, often overlooking the unique cultural experiences and insights that minority students bring to the classroom each day (Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2011). This oversight results in educational experiences that devalue minority students' intellectual potential, quieting their voices and leading to uncertainty regarding their academic potential. This framing of our education system contributes to disparities in educational opportunities and achievement, also recognized as the "achievement gap" (Colgren & Sappington, 2015). It is crucial to understand how these disparities manifest in minority student participation in our public school system offerings and the effects beyond formal K-12 education.

Educational and political leaders in the United States recognize that an achievement gap exists and have tried to resolve these gaps and schools' poor performance by putting programs and processes into place that increase students' rigorous coursework enrollment. U.S. high schools use acceleration programs and curricula to prepare students to take on the rigors of postsecondary education (Ndura et al., 2003). These programs provide access to college readiness skills defined as "the cognitive strategies, content knowledge, and self-management skills and knowledge about postsecondary education required to access and be successful in college" (Jaffe & Lee, 2011, p. 284). Having such skills increases the students' likelihood of success. Completing their postsecondary education provides the desired outcomes of critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, work, and life skills (Strauss, 2015). Further, a

review of the literature supports the idea that acceleration programs enhance educational outcomes (Backes et al., 2014; Flowers, 2008; Roderick et al., 2009) and are widely available to students (Barnard-Brak et al., 2011; Conger et al., 2009; Kettler & Hurst, 2017; Theokas & Saaris, 2013). Nevertheless, despite what the research shows regarding these programs' benefits and who needs them most, there is a substantial portion of our population—our minority students, who do not reap these programs' benefits. In the following section, I present an argument that demonstrates how the educational inequities inherent in our educational system can have a lasting impact on student outcomes.

Minority students experience a disconnect with our current educational system resulting in continued underrepresentation and ill-preparedness for college and university rigors compared to their Caucasian peers (Backes et al., 2014). Reviewing minority enrollment in high school acceleration programs across the U.S. educational landscape supports this idea. Minority students (Hispanic, American Indian, and African American) make up 52% of U.S. public school students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Conversely, they comprise only 28.6% of Advanced Placement (AP) exam test takers (College Board, 2014) and 23% of IB Diploma Candidates (International Baccalaureate, 2010). These numbers are concerning because the research demonstrates that 91% of U.S. public school students attend schools with these programs (Theokas & Saaris, 2013). The research also shows that accelerated program participation increases college enrollment and completion success (Martinez & Klopott, 2005).

Additionally, on average, participating students experienced higher college entrance exam scores, higher GPAs, increased postsecondary attainment and income. Minority students, however, have lower participation and experience lower attainment in these areas than their Asian and Caucasian peers (Flowers, 2008). These lower rates can reduce opportunities for

success at the postsecondary level and beyond. If accelerated coursework has proven an effective measure to prepare students for postsecondary education and the world of work after, then minority students also need such preparation. Why aren't more minority students enrolled in these programs, which appear to be widely available?

This question can be answered through a literature review, which supports the notion that this continued gap in college readiness and access is a result of educational inequalities for minority students in the U.S. K-12 educational system (Burriss & Garrity, 2008; Colgren & Sappington, 2015; Whiting & Ford, 2009). Although there is access for all students, in theory, the lack of minority students enrolled in acceleration programs indicates that there are factors in the current U.S. education system that perpetuates educational opportunity inequalities.

Colgren and Sappington (2015) stated, "White students have access to superior programs both at school and outside the educational setting" (p.25). Furthermore, they argued that current efforts to increase minority enrollment in acceleration programs amounted to *transactional* change, which is a change that seeks to improve the existing system. Instead, the focus should be to create *transformational change*, which is a change in how the existing educational system operates (Colgren & Sappington, 2015). This statement indicates that the educational system's current ways of educating minority students and even how the system seeks to reduce the gaps still breed inequity as the system's design benefits Caucasian students. For example, although minority students have access to accelerated programs, these opportunities are "hoarded" by Caucasian students who often take the majority of the slots in these programs based on admission criteria that often reduce the number of eligible minority students (Burriss & Garrity, 2008; Perna et al., 2015;). There is a need to evaluate the mechanisms in which educational inequality manifests through minority student enrollment in acceleration programs. This study

identified and analyzed factors that shaped minority enrollment in high school acceleration programs.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this Dissertation in Practice is to understand how minority students make their decisions regarding International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program (DP) (a college preparatory program) enrollment in a dedicated magnet high school, emphasizing why eligible minority students choose not to participate. Developing this understanding provided insight into minority students' access issues related to my local IBDP program.

The literature review demonstrated the lack of participation, application, and minority students' enrollment in high school acceleration programs and the benefits of participation that these students may be missing. These missed opportunities can be amplified and manifested as reduced postsecondary educational attainment and reduced labor market outcomes (Backes et al., 2014). High school acceleration programs are one of the pathways shown to impact students' future educational outcomes significantly. Federal and local governments, school districts, and numerous educational organizations, including the College Board and the International Baccalaureate Organization, recognize this impact. They have organized to increase minority access and enrollment. Even with these efforts, minority students are still underrepresented in these programs.

Because the potential to influence future outcomes exists, it is crucial to understand how and why students make their decisions. I am specifically interested in knowing why students may choose not to participate in the IBDP. The literature review identified several possible factors that students and their families may consider when choosing their high school options. These factors may include things such as previous coursework to prepare for accelerated programs

(Burriss & Garrity, 2008; Whiting & Ford, 2009), formal and informal expectations of family and teachers (Kettle & Hurst, 2017), lack of understanding of the program and its benefits (Backes et al., 2014), school and family support (Kyburg et al., 2007; Suldo et al., 2018), student self-efficacy (Uwah et al., 2008) and academic self-concept (Wilson et al., 2014). Learning about the decision-making process can potentially identify factors for school leaders to address to increase minority students' enrollment in acceleration programs. Addressing these factors can help students take advantage of the educational opportunities available to them so that they may have greater control of their postsecondary and career options. Additionally, researchers can begin to examine educational practices that contribute to these students' educational inequalities to understand better how these inequalities manifest through enrollment decisions.

Research Question

Although some literature explores student experiences while enrolled in acceleration programs, I have been unable to find many studies that thoroughly explored student enrollment decisions or acceleration program participation decisions from the students' point of view. To further develop this understanding, my research sought to answer the following question:

What factors do minority students identify as important when making enrollment decisions for an International Baccalaureate Diploma Program (IBDP)?

Study Overview and Feasibility

After reviewing studies related to acceleration programs and minority students, I found limited research about the factors that may encourage or discourage students from enrolling in these programs. This gap made an exploratory research design a good fit to achieve the goals of this study. My research findings have contributed to understanding why eligible minority students may not enroll in the IB program and how a lack of enrollment may contribute to or

manifest the achievement gap and educational inequality. This gap ultimately impacts college readiness.

Understanding how minority students chose to participate in the program was a first step that may ultimately impact the program's implementation and outcomes related to minority student participation and performance. With insight into why students may choose or decline to enroll, school districts can adjust policy and practice implementation to better meet these students' needs. These adjustments may include reviewing and revising qualifications and admissions criteria and revisiting how schools target students for this program. After making these adjustments, the district could then evaluate the outcomes concerning these changes.

This research's setting occurred in a large urban school district in Florida that served more than 120,000 students. This district had a high minority student population, with more than 60% of its students from non-Caucasian and Asian homes. The site for this research study was a mid-sized high school with an enrollment of nearly 1400. For this research study, I refer to this school as Magnet High School.

This school is a public magnet high school that became a magnet school in 1997 due to low enrollment. This school's demographics represent the larger school district's makeup with a demographic profile of over 50% minority students. The school's magnet program offers an honors, AP, and IB curriculum. Students enter the school through the district's magnet lottery or by applying for admission. The admission eligibility criteria for the Honors/AP track is completing Algebra 1. There are varying priority levels based on factors such as the parent's military status, neighborhood preference (students who live in the former attendance area of the school), sibling preference (currently has a sibling attending the school), or program continuity (went to a middle school that has a program with the same academic theme). The school district

provides free bus transportation to any city student admitted to the school's Honors/AP program or the IB program.

The school's IB program admits students through a merit-based application process. Students become eligible to apply by obtaining a level 3 or higher on the Florida state reading and mathematics assessments in their 7th grade year or receiving a nationally norm-referenced test qualifying score. A letter from the district office of acceleration notifies students and their families of their eligibility and invites them to informational presentations and school tours. Students are encouraged to attend an informational session and tour all the schools that they are considering. Once students decide to apply, they are evaluated and ranked on a points system based on their 7th grade test scores, 7th grade final grades, and 8th grade Quarter One grades.

When applying, students can choose up to two accelerated programs, and they must rank order their choices. Each student is considered for their first choice school, and they must meet the minimum points established for admission. For the cohort of students in this study, that minimum number was 70. If the students met the minimum required points for their first choice school, they are offered admission. If they do not meet the minimum for that school, they are considered for their second choice. The school can admit up to 150 students each year at the 9th grade level. However, a lack of qualified applicants means that the program may not reach capacity. Students who applied for the program are automatically enrolled unless they submit documentation declining their seat in the program. Program participants make up less than half of the school; however, these students' demographic profile closely resembles the school's population, making Magnet High School different than many other acceleration program.

Magnet High School's diverse student body and curricular offering were ideal for this study. This diversity occurred within and outside of the IBDP and represented the school

district's overall demographics. Further, this site had a willing and supportive administration and support staff who welcomed the information that this study produced to improve its IB program. The sample obtained from this study and the information gathered can be applied in the school district's broader context. Because of the school's magnet status, several students attending the school were invited to participate in the IB program but declined. These students provided a large sample pool for identifying reasons for rejecting the program admission opportunity. Both of these perspectives are critical to understanding enrollment decisions. To have access to the students for interviews and the data needed to conduct this research, I worked through the university and school district IRB processes to ensure that the appropriate protocols were in place to work with student participants. Parent permission forms informed parents and students of the research study's aims.

Significance

Access to a high-quality curriculum through acceleration/college preparatory programs is essential to student postsecondary education and opportunity success (Flowers, 2008). However, there is a continued gap in college readiness and access for minority students because they are not equitably exposed to this curriculum (Backes et al., 2014; Barnard-Brak et al., 2011).

By identifying factors that impact student enrollment decisions in an IB program, I have provided information that will assist educational practitioners in my local context in their understanding of minority students' perceived enrollment barriers. Providing robust qualitative data gave a picture of what is happening with IB program choices and delivered insight into how or why students made these decisions. The research design used student interviews to gather data; it was a significant approach because it gave voice to minority students and placed value on their experiences.

Using research based on their voice may improve students' and families' responsiveness to interventions, thus increasing program enrollment. For educational leaders at the study site, these research findings may improve program outcomes for minority students. For leaders at the school and within the school district, the study findings can help administrators develop a deeper understanding of program access barriers and help develop policies and practices that address these perceived barriers. The findings may also lead to other research areas to address practices that may impact the achievement gap between minority students and their Caucasian peers, thereby making progress towards more equitable outcomes for the school district.

Conclusion

Minority students' educational system experiences have led to a legacy of underrepresentation in participation in acceleration programs, a factor that has the potential to impact postsecondary outcomes significantly. This study provided a critical evaluation of minority students' considerations when they made decisions to enroll in an IB program at the study site. This study's foundation rests on the information gathered through the background analysis in Chapter 2, which details critical points of interest. This analysis provided support for an exploratory qualitative study's design, which used interviews to identify IBDP program enrollment barriers. Chapter 3 contains information about the barriers identified by the study findings. Through this investigation, I have submitted my findings, the implications of this research, recommendations for further action, and my plan to disseminate this information to stakeholders impacted by this work to contribute to research and practice in this area.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND ANALYSIS

Introduction

Chapter 1 provided an overview of how minority students continue to lag behind their Caucasian and Asian peers due to the achievement gap, resulting in lower enrollment in the IBDP and reduced postsecondary outcomes (Flowers, 2008). My interest in this problem led to the development of my Dissertation in Practice, in which I seek to understand how minority students make their decisions regarding enrollment in the IBDP (a college preparatory program), with an emphasis on understanding why eligible minority students choose not to participate. This chapter provides additional context through existing literature related to this problem. I show how the literature research results informed my work and provided insight into this study's local context. Finally, I discuss the merits of this dissertation and its contributions to the body of knowledge.

Rigorous Coursework Defined

High school students' exposure to rigorous coursework before postsecondary education impacts student success at university and beyond (Flowers, 2008). College and university data support the idea that many U.S. public school students arrive unprepared for their institutions' rigorous coursework because they do not experience rigor in most public schools' general education curriculum (Backes et al., 2014; Martinez & Klopott, 2005). The High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 Second Follow-up (Radford et al., 2018) reported that 72.4% of U.S. high school graduates enrolled in postsecondary education, however after three years, only 47.2% remained enrolled at four-year institutions. This statistic suggests a disconnect between high school and college completion. College Readiness is "the cognitive strategies, content

knowledge, and self-management skills and knowledge about postsecondary education required to access and be successful in college and college access” (Jaffe & Lee, 2011, p. 284).

Traditional high school curriculums may not be intentional in developing these skills in students.

Due to this lack of skill development, organizations such as the College Board (the AP program) and the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBDP) developed curricula and programs to meet these needs (College Board, 2021; International Baccalaureate, 2021).

According to their bylaws, the College Board developed an AP course in the late 1950s to transition students from high school to postsecondary study and as a means for higher education institutions to evaluate students’ ability (College Board, 2021). These exams measure the performance standards that represent the expectations of a large portion of educational institutions (College Board, 2021). Student performance on these exams helps determine placement in college courses, and in some instances, students are allowed to opt for introductory college courses based on their performance.

The IBDP, established in 1968, was created as a means to ensure that the curriculum for students who traveled internationally was transferable from one country to another, leading to a focus on standards that reflect the expectations of the international education community (International Baccalaureate, 2021). The IBDP program has evolved since its inception and is distinct in its focus on critical thinking skills and cognitive strategies developed through teaching and learning, international mindedness, and language development approaches (International Baccalaureate, 2021). The development of programs like the IBDP demonstrates that many people in the educational community believe there is a need for students’ development before entering a university.

Relationship Between AP and IB

With this in mind, minority students who do not access such programs may be deficient in the skills that these programs purport to develop. For this study, I focused on the IBDP; however, it was essential to draw upon existing literature about similar programs as they are all affected by common issues such as access and low minority enrollment. The literature often referenced both the AP and the IB programs when discussing advanced coursework issues. This scholarship informed the development of my research question as it provided insight into the identification of the issues of access that I chose to research. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge the AP's place in college preparation as many studies referenced this program in conjunction with IB when discussing the importance of rigorous coursework.

Additionally, the AP program is more widely available. The AP program enables willing and academically prepared students to pursue college-level studies while still in high school. The program consists of AP Program-developed college-level courses that high schools can offer, and corresponding exams administered once a year (College Board, 2021). It is important to note that in many settings, students are encouraged to enroll in AP courses for subjects that they believe to be strengths (e.g., physics, biology, English). Therefore, while AP provides rigor and challenge for college preparation, participating students may not be receiving or participating at this level in all of their course work.

The IBDP is an assessed program for students aged 16 to 19. The DP is an academically challenging and balanced program of education. Through the IBDP, schools develop students who: (a) have excellent breadth and depth of knowledge; (b) flourish physically, intellectually, emotionally, and ethically; (c) study at least two languages; (d) excel in traditional academic subjects; and (e) explore the nature of knowledge through the program's theory of knowledge

course. (International Baccalaureate, 2021). The IB program presents, through its research section of the website, a wide range of studies that attest to the IB program's benefit to all student groups, including minority and low-income students. This research claims that students participating in the program experience a 20% increased probability of graduating from high school and a 38% increased probability of graduating from college (International Baccalaureate, 2018). These rates are consistent regardless of income level and minority status, suggesting that the program minimizes the impact of race and income on student outcomes.

This claim is significant. If participating in the IB program increases enrollment chances for college, then it can be argued that this outcome alone makes the program worthwhile. Halic's (2013) research on IB students' postsecondary attainment found that "when compared with national rates, DP graduates enroll, persist and graduate on time at higher rates" (p. 9), with graduation rates 39% higher than the national average at public universities and 29% higher at private institutions. These claims demonstrated positive outcomes for all participating students, and the program's focus on a well-rounded education, which requires the students to participate in a broad liberal arts curriculum, makes the IB program unique. Participation in college preparatory programs such as IB enhances college readiness and postsecondary outcomes for participating students (Roderick et al., 2009), thus increasing success in college enrollment and completion (Martinez & Klopott, 2005). For these reasons, I chose the IBDP as the focus of this study.

However, not all students can participate in such programs, or some students may choose not to participate when offered a chance even though they have the potential to improve their postsecondary outcomes. Additionally, the traditional curriculum across states and municipalities vary. The variation in secondary achievement and curriculum contributes to the gap in

postsecondary attainment (Backes et al., 2014). Programs like AP and IB provide for a more standardized curriculum that supports essential skills. On average, students who participated in programs such as these had higher college entrance exam scores, higher GPAs, postsecondary attainment, and income. Black and Hispanic students, however, experienced lower attainment than their Asian and Caucasian peers (Flowers, 2008). These college preparatory programs play a significant role in promoting student achievement. However, minority students (except Asian students) lag in accelerated coursework participation that enhances postsecondary success (Martinez & Klopott, 2005).

Minority students continue to be underrepresented in and ill-prepared for college and university rigors compared to their Caucasian peers. (Backes et al., 2014). This phenomenon is consistent with minority enrollment in high school acceleration programs across the United States, where minority student participation does not mirror their representation in U.S. public schools. Minority students (Hispanic, American Indian, and African American) make up 52% of U.S. public school students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Yet, they comprise only 28.6% of AP exam test takers (College Board, 2014) and 23% of IB Diploma Candidates (International Baccalaureate, 2010). The IBDP, both internationally and in my local context, demonstrated a larger student enrollment gap between its non-Asian minority participants and their Caucasian peers compared to the overall minority student population. It is essential to understand the factors that contribute to this gap so that more minority students benefit from these programs.

Minority Student Participation in Advanced/IB Programs

This disparity, in part, can be attributed to pre high school factors such as grade level of enrollment in Algebra 1 and tracking in middle school that excludes minority students from

gifted and talented coursework that provides the necessary preparation for high school acceleration programs (Burriss et al., 2009; Conger et al., 2009; Whiting & Ford, 2009). To explain further, Algebra 1 is often considered a “gatekeeping” course that is essential to higher-level math courses. Many acceleration programs require that students take Algebra 1 before high school. Students without this opportunity, because they were tracked into lower-level math courses, often cannot enter accelerated coursework in high school. This tracking is often based on perceived ability and often excludes minority students (Whiting & Ford, 2009) and continues through high school. The result of these practices is that fewer minority students have the opportunity to participate in accelerated or college preparatory coursework based on prerequisite requirements (Whiting & Ford, 2009).

National initiatives such as Equity 2000 and the Urban Systemic Initiative (Martinez & Klopott, 2005) have developed guidance and programs to increase minority student participation in high school acceleration and college preparatory programs. Additionally, the federal government and organizations such as the College Board have given millions of actual and in-kind dollars (devoting funds within their budgets to develop initiatives) to encourage minority participation in these programs, including assistance in establishing these programs and helping to pay the costs associated with these programs. (Ndura et al., 2003; Theokis & Saaris, 2013). However, significant gaps remain in minority student participation. These gaps persist despite the fact that acceleration programs are widely available in schools attended by minority students. Theokis and Saaris (2013) presented research that showed that minority student participation is low despite 91% of U.S. public school students attending a school where at least one acceleration/college preparatory program existed. Of the schools that offered an acceleration pathway, 50% of those schools offered more than one (Perna et al., 2015). In Florida, 55% of the

students attending a school with the IBDP were minority students, but less than 30% of minority students enrolled in this program (Perna et al., 2015). Furthermore, research demonstrated that because Black and Hispanic students were more likely to attend magnet schools, the likelihood of participating in advanced coursework increased (Conger et al., 2009). Even with this increased access, minority student enrollment was still disproportionately low.

The evidence presented here demonstrates that minority participation in acceleration programs has little relation to traditional definitions of access. These programs are widely available in various formats at most high schools. Instead, other factors impact participation and access. These factors may include things such as required previous coursework (Burris & Garrity, 2008; Whiting & Ford, 2009), formal and informal expectations of family and teachers (Kettle & Hurst, 2017), lack of understanding of the program and its benefits (Backes et al., 2014), school and family support (Kyburg et al., 2007; Suldo et al., 2018), student self-efficacy (Uwah et al., 2008), and academic self-concept (Wilson et al., 2014). This study sought to identify these and other unknown factors to determine their impact on students.

Availability and Access to Advanced Coursework

Student access to acceleration programs can be examined from a variety of viewpoints. Here, I discuss access at its simplest level, exploring the degree to which acceleration programs are available where minority students attend high school. Next, I develop a more comprehensive understanding of what access means and how it impacts minority students. The reviewed studies used quantitative analyses of descriptive data from large data warehouses such as the National Center for Education Statistics and the Florida Department of Education Data Warehouse. The data is comprehensive and representative of a large sample of the population. Therefore, conclusions drawn based on this information can apply across a variety of contexts.

Scholars recognized that access is more nuanced than mere availability and is influenced by how educators interact with minority students (Colgren & Sappington, 2015). Several studies supported the position that acceleration programs are widely available (Theokis & Saaris, 2013). However, there are differences in access depending upon a student's location and race or ethnicity. One example of these differences is between rural, suburban, and urban school programs concerning program size and the number of course offerings, with only 59% of rural schools offering an acceleration program compared to 86% percent of suburban schools and 74% of urban schools (Theokas & Saaris, 2013).

Another example demonstrates the disparities in access: the number and variety of courses in schools attended by minority students. There are fewer advanced course offerings available at schools with higher minority and low socioeconomic populations, thus, contributing to unequal numbers of minority student participation (Barnard-Brak et al., 2011). This point is supported by the data that demonstrated that only 58% of schools offered what is considered a complete AP program, which is a program offering courses in English, math, science, and social science (Theokis & Saaris, 2013). This condition may mean that rural and low-income schools offer only two or three advanced course offerings or may not offer any courses in areas such as science and math.

This difference in program breadth has the potential to impact student outcomes. Moore and Slate (2008) cited statistics by the College Board noting that students who take multiple advanced courses finish their bachelor's degree in four years or less at higher rates than students who do not take multiple advanced courses. This finding supports the idea that the degree of availability impacts student opportunity. When students have fewer offerings to choose from, they may not fully experience the program's benefits like their peers who have a wider range of

available courses. This research may also explain the disproportionate rates of minority student attendance at magnet schools (Conger et al., 2009).

The ideas of availability and access also address student participation in these programs. Some studies recognized that the ability to participate in these programs relied on more than physical location or eligibility (Burriss & Garrity, 2008; Colgren & Sappington, 2015; Conger et al., 2009; Kettle & Hurst, 2017; Perna et al., 2015; Whiting & Ford, 2009). These studies highlighted the idea that there are factors that impact student access to these programs even when they are housed in schools that minority students attend.

Traditional schooling in the U.S. is more advantageous to Caucasian students, contributing to the growth of the achievement and access gap seen in education (Colgren & Sappington, 2015). Student education in the U.S. is based upon the needs and perspectives of Caucasian Americans. This advantage emerges from the distribution of beliefs and practices based on the dominant culture. For example, the ideas and beliefs about ability and intelligence have their basis in white superiority (Rector-Aranda, 2016). These beliefs form the basis of modern standardized testing that occurs in American schools. If measures of successful performance rest upon one group's characteristics or preferences, groups who fall outside of those lines are more likely not to meet those standards, thus positioning them without access to the benefits of achievement as measured by these assessments. As our country's racial and ethnic composition has shifted, the way we teach children has experienced little change. The current education system does not recognize the impact of race on how students receive and process information (Kohli et al., 2017; Rector-Aranda, 2016). Research showed that Caucasian teachers often attempted to practice color-blindness and did not consider the impact of race and racial bias on students (Kohli et al., 2017). These studies showed that education design might not fit the

needs and unique perspectives of minority students. These differences and non-conformity set the stage for curricular tracking.

Curricular tracking is a manifestation of implicit bias in schools. Tracking involves students being divided into courses based on their ability. These assignments begin as early as elementary school to identify gifted students and talented students (Burriss & Garrity, 2008; Whiting & Ford, 2009), which often excludes minority students. Tracking minority students into low ability track curriculum, particularly for African American males, is often a function of discipline concerns rather than student ability (Rector-Aranda, 2016). One example supporting this idea is the disproportionate number of African American males in special education programs that have placement origins based on behavior (Harris-Murri et al., 2006).

Disproportionate placement in special education programs puts minority students on a curricular pathway that significantly reduces their ability to access accelerated coursework. Another critical aspect of tracking minority students takes place in middle school. This tracking determines student access to necessary prerequisite courses such as Algebra 1 completion before high school (Conger et al., 2009; Whiting & Ford, 2009). With students' division into high ability and low ability tracks, minority students are the dominant group in the latter category. They do not have the opportunity to access coursework that allows them to possess the credentials or background necessary to participate in advanced coursework, thus excluding them from program consideration regardless of their academic ability or potential. Accordingly, the disproportionate tracking of minority students (Burriss & Garrity, 2008; Whiting & Ford, 2009) can have an adverse effect on accelerated program access and eventual success.

Many acceleration programs in high schools, such as the IB Diploma Program, have imposed student admissions criteria (Perna et al., 2015). These criteria often depend upon

students' access to specific courses before entering high school or having specific standardized test scores. The IB Organization imposes no criteria for student participation, yet such criteria exist in many schools with the program. Such policies can serve as barriers to participation for students. Because of these criteria and the disadvantages created due to curricular tracking, there continues to be a gap in minority students' participation (Burriss & Garrity, 2008).

Opportunity hoarding, described as people from more privileged backgrounds who take up the spaces and opportunities afforded by programs such as IB (Burriss & Garrity, 2008; Perna et al., 2015), further perpetuates this gap. Although a program may be in a school that can impact many minority students, non-minority students disproportionately dominate participation opportunities. This phenomenon may be attributed to higher achievement rates on standardized tests and general school performance by Caucasian students. When schools employ admissions criteria that favor achievement testing, they perpetuate an implicit bias by favoring Caucasian and Asian students who historically perform better on these measures. Burriss et al. (2009) suggested that eliminating admissions criteria and having open access, or not imposing any admissions criteria, would help eliminate acceleration program gaps.

Access to accelerated programs is complex and can be understood from a variety of perspectives. As I conducted my study, it was essential to consider how access manifested for minority students and their participation in acceleration programs.

Social and Cultural Factors Impacting Access

Although the reasons cited above are primary issues concerning minority students' access, there are other inequity issues. Along with criteria for selection, educators have subtle expectations about the types of students who should participate in acceleration programs (Kettle & Hurst, 2017). These subtle expectations often rely on the idea that factors prevent minority

students from performing well in such programs. These expectations can lead to both formal and informal discouragement of students from participating, even when they may have the opportunity to do so (Perna et al., 2015). There may also be a lack of information or understanding of these programs and the resources available to students and their families (Backes et al., 2014). If students are not fully informed about a program and the benefits it may provide, they are less likely to participate. Additionally, minority students often are a part of families with limited income. This family dynamic can impact a student's ability to participate due to the financial resources that may be required, such as costs associated with exams, books, and supplies (Klopfenstein, 2004).

Most of the factors that impact access are often outside of student control. Likewise, additional factors in students' social and cultural environments also influence their participation. The support available to students outside of the classroom impacts their participation (Kyburg et al., 2007). Support resources from school and home that work together to encourage students are most successful in developing students' capacity in advanced programs (Kyburg et al., 2007; Suldo et al., 2018). Where these integrated supports are not available, students experience less success.

The culture of the school or the program within the school is another critical factor. Students must feel a sense of belonging to the group (O'Connor et al., 2011; Park et al., 2014). School culture is the set of shared values, beliefs, and norms (Hoy & Miskel, 2012) that drive the school's environment. If a particular group or culture dominates the school culture, this may impact whom students interact with and how they participate in the school environment. Minority students navigate their academic choices based on the idea of how they fit in. If students do not feel a sense of belonging, they may opt not to participate or cease participation.

This feeling of belonging can be enhanced or supported by familial support, student engagement, motivation, and coping strategies (O'Connor et al., 2011; Suldo et al., 2018).

Other social factors that impact student participation included factors that affected their social life and ability to be a “teenager.” Students weighed the impact that acceleration programs had on their ability to hang out with their friends or participate in clubs and sports activities (Foust et al., 2009). For minority students, the idea that their friendships could be affected is significant because fewer minority students participate in these programs, thus possibly causing them to believe that they may lose touch with other minority students (O'Connor et al., 2011). The perceived benefits of these programs and parental influence on students to participate and perform were other important factors to consider as I began to investigate students' enrollment decisions.

Student Beliefs

It is vital to explore how access and the student's social and cultural environment intersect with and impact students' beliefs in their ability to participate and be successful in a challenging academic program. The ideas presented are nuanced and show the complexity of how a variety of factors influence students' belief and their understanding of what they can do. For example, if through previous educational experiences students receive the message that they may not be smart, perhaps messaged through placement in lower track curriculum (Burriss & Garrity, 2008; Whiting & Ford, 2009), students may believe this to be true and be less inclined to take on academic challenges. Additionally, if the student's social and cultural environment demonstrates that minority students do not fit in, minority students may be reluctant to participate in activities dominated by the majority group. Student beliefs develop through their interactions with their environment and, therefore, become a critical component of student access

and participation in advanced coursework (Uwah et al., 2008). To further explain how these ideas are interdependent, I reviewed studies that used qualitative data gathered through student interviews and survey instruments to measure student self-concept.

The ideas of student academic self-concept and self-efficacy are closely related (Uwah et al., 2008; Wilson et al., 2014). *Student self-concept* is the beliefs a student has about him or herself, a construct developed by students' academic difficulties, their ability to overcome those challenges, and student comparison of their abilities to others. If students perceive that they can keep up with challenging tasks at a comparable rate to their peers, their performance and ability to reach their goals are higher. This finding presents an interesting dilemma for minority students. If the traditional schooling components, including school culture, communicate explicitly or implicitly that they are not as capable as their peers, then minority students' beliefs in their abilities may be damaged. This belief in ability directly impacts the student's *self-efficacy* or how they feel about themselves. How minority students feel about themselves is in direct relation to their sense of belonging. Minority students who feel accepted also feel respected and valued (Uwah et al., 2008). These positive feelings have a positive relationship with positive academic outcomes (Uwah et al., 2008) and bolster student beliefs in their academic abilities. O'Connor et al. (2011) supported this idea by noting that minority students bypass challenging coursework because they "hunger for places of respect" (O'Connor et al., 2011, p. 1254)—classrooms where they are not racially isolated and their cultural backgrounds were valued.

Students have also shared what they perceive to be the advantages and disadvantages of AP and IB programs. The advantages noted included preparation for college, better classroom environments as students had similar goals, teacher preparedness, and a special bond with other

students with similar experiences (Foust et al., 2009). Differences included negative stereotypes, a heavier workload, and stress and fatigue from the programs (Foust et al., 2009).

Student beliefs regarding their abilities are largely social and heavily dependent on their prior educational experience (Ndura et al., 2003) and their interactions with those around them, including school personnel, peers, and family. These areas received further exploration as I conducted my study to determine if these factors influenced student participation in the IB program at Magnet High School and to what degree.

Shortcomings of Existing Studies

Many of the studies reviewed existing data and analyzed phenomena that have already happened. They collected data and drew conclusions from information already known to the authors, who offered their interpretations of existing data. Additionally, this literature focused mainly on quantitative data and lacked the detail and insight provided through qualitative measures such as interviews or case studies. Because of this lack of qualitative data, few studies examined a wide range of student perceptions, including discussing factors that may prevent student participation in acceleration programs or the IB Diploma program. These limitations have led to the need to gain deeper insight into the issue of access.

Study Context

The study occurred in a large urban school district in Florida. The district is comprised of 196 schools serving 129,181 students, with 30,246 of those students enrolled in 19 high schools. The district is a majority-minority school district with the following demographic profile: African American 43%, Caucasian 34%, Hispanic 13%, Multiracial 5%, Asian 4%, and American Indian/Alaska Native <1%.

The proposed site for this research is a public magnet high school, for which we will give the pseudonym Magnet High School, that became a magnet school in the late 1990s as a result of low enrollment. The magnet program helped to boost school enrollment and also helped to relieve the only other existing dedicated magnet college preparatory high school in the district whose demand exceeded its capacity.

The study site has an enrollment of 1464 students. The school population mirrors the larger school district's makeup with a demographic profile that includes: African American 44%, Caucasian 36%, Hispanic 8%, Multiracial 3%, and Asian 9%. The magnet program at this site offers an honors program that feeds into the AP program and an IB program. Students on the honors/AP track enter the school through the district's magnet lottery. To be eligible for admission, students must have passed Algebra 1 in 8th grade. There is no grade point average or testing requirement to get in. However, there is a tiered admission, with preference given for military, students who lived in the school's former attendance area, students who attended a feeder school, a middle school with the same magnet theme, and students who have siblings at the school. Approximately 70% percent of the school's student population are students on the AP track.

Students in the IB program enter through the district acceleration program merit-based application process. This process admits students who meet the following qualifications: 8th grade students with a minimum of level 3 on 7th grade reading and math Florida Standards Assessment, minimum of 2.75 middle school GPA, and completion of Algebra 1. Each program criteria have a point value calculated for each student application, 26 points for final 7th grade grades, 30 points for 7th grade FSA scores, and 34 points for first semester 8th grade academic core grades. Six hundred slots at the four schools enable up to 150 students to enter each school's

IB program. Eligible students receive mailed notifications in October of their 8th grade year. Currently, students in the IB program are approximately 30% of the school's population. For the 2019-2020 school year, the projected enrollment is 444 with 32.43% African American, 40% Caucasian, 9.91% Hispanic, 4.05% Multi-racial, 13.29% Asian, and .23% American Indian/Alaskan Native.

The school administration has targeted the school's IB program to increase the growth and retention of students. The school has supported this growth by first retaining students enrolled in the program. The graduating class of 2020 had grown from an average of 50 students 10 years ago to an average of 80 students. These numbers continue to increase, with both the junior and sophomore classes retaining over 100 students. This retention is enabled by implementing program supports such as a study skills course and more counselor and student interactions to explain program expectations.

Program growth has been supported by expanding opportunities for student participation. Ten years ago, the Diploma Program was only available to students who committed to the entire program. However, the school has offered opportunities for AP students to participate in individual IB courses. Additionally, although 9th grade is the typical entry year for the program, the school has created opportunities for students within the school to join the program after 9th grade. Although there is an opportunity, students are still evaluated based on current grades and coursework.

This school site was selected to examine access to IB programs because it is the most diverse program in this school district, a diversity that mirrors that of the district and school. The diversity allows for a variety of participants to be included in my study to get a more comprehensive examination of student participation and access issues. Additionally, school

personnel's focus on developing program operations to be more inclusive for all students made it an ideal site to examine data and perhaps lead to implementing recommendations from this research study.

Summary and Contributions of This DiP

The literature review supports the idea that access to a high-quality curriculum through acceleration/college preparatory programs is essential to student success in their postsecondary education and opportunities. However, there is a continued gap in college readiness and access for minority students because they are not equitably exposed to this curriculum. This cumulative inequality is a result of educational inequalities for minority students that permeate the American educational system. Although there is access for all students in theory, as most students attend schools where these programs are available, the lack of minority students' enrollment in acceleration programs indicates that there are factors that perpetuate this inequality. The researchers' findings demonstrated how various factors impacted student participation and success and examined how these related to student perceptions of self. The researchers also explored the factors that impacted minority students' ability to experience success in an advanced curriculum. However, these researchers do not directly capture students' voices and therefore miss a pivotal component to understanding how these trends continue to persist.

There was a need to evaluate student decision-making and how existing educational inequities may influence these decisions. Through this DiP, I interviewed African American and Hispanic minority students who met the IB program eligibility criteria in their school district. I sought to gain insight into factors that both encouraged and discouraged enrollment. Employing research that includes their voice may make students and families more responsive to interventions, thus increasing enrollment. The research findings suggested other research areas

for exploring the root causes of the achievement gap between minority students and their Caucasian peers and enable progress towards more equitable outcomes.

CHAPTER 3

INVESTIGATIVE APPROACH

COVID-19

Prior to describing my investigative approach, I must discuss the impact of COVID-19 on the public school environment in my study context and its impact on my research. The 2020-2021 school year began with uncertainty. Two weeks before school started, administrators determined that schools would resume via a mixture of virtual and hybrid instruction. Virtual instruction required students to do all coursework using the designated online platform. In the hybrid plan, students attended school in person two days per week by grade level and participated in online instruction three days of the week. Students on the hybrid model resumed full-time in-person instruction approximately one month into the school year. This limited access to students and the logistics of school operations resulted in a delay in recruiting students to participate in this study.

The health concerns related to the pandemic led to significant shifts in instructional personnel at the school. There were unexpected retirements and resignations as a result of COVID-19. Due to these personnel changes, I became the teacher of record for a portion of the population of students I wished to interview for my research, responsible for their instruction and grades until the end of October. Out of an abundance of caution and to maintain my study's integrity, I chose to delay data collection until I was no longer the teacher of record for any students. It was important for students not to feel obligated to participate because of my involvement with their grades. This status also led to a more significant reliance on teachers to present my research and recruit students to the study.

Florida State University also distributed COVID-19 guidelines on conducting human research. These guidelines required all face-to-face interaction, which was my study's original design, to be converted to virtual interactions. This requirement presented some technological challenges as all students did not have access to various platforms and computers. This challenge was overcome by gathering students at the school and providing school laptops to conduct the interviews. Students participated, socially distanced in a classroom, while I interviewed them from another room. Additionally, during one of the focus group interviews, the conference platform did not record correctly, requiring me to conduct a second interview with this group. All parent interviews were conducted virtually, at convenient times for the parents.

While challenging, the procedure changes did not impact my ability to collect in-depth qualitative data from student participants. Student and parent decisions regarding participation in the IB program were made before the widespread effects of COVID-19. Therefore, the information collected was relevant and not altered by COVID-19.

Study Design Overview

This study addressed the gap in the available information regarding minority student enrollment decisions in the IBDP. In order to learn more about how and why students make enrollment decisions, it was essential to employ a research design that allowed for “probing the experiences of individuals involved and the setting in which it is occurring” (Educational Leadership and Policy Studies 2018, p. 12). This gathering of rich descriptive data contributed to the current body of knowledge. An exploratory research model design enables researchers to gather information to obtain new insights or support the current understanding of the studied phenomena. The goal of exploratory research is to “ultimately offer recommendations for interventions or policy to address the problem that are feasible and actionable” (Educational

Leadership and Policy Studies, 2018 p. 12). Because researchers know very little about what drives minority student decisions about IBDP enrollment, an exploratory study was the most appropriate design to acquire foundational information for school and district leaders to ensure that the program benefits all students, including its minority student population.

As discussed in the literature review, several studies have investigated the impact of different factors on student performance. While these investigations and their methods provided a valuable body of knowledge, they do not always adequately provide insight into students' thoughts and how these factors may influence their decision-making. As this research sought to gain insight into how students make decisions to ensure a more thorough and complete understanding of minority student decision-making, I have chosen to speak directly to students by employing qualitative research methods. Patton (2015) tells us that "Qualitative inquiry is personal" (p. 40).

If my goal is to understand how and why students make their decisions, I must use methods that allow for personal interaction. Qualitative inquiry provides context (Patton, 2015). To truly understand the decision-making of minority students, I must also gain insight into the backgrounds and experiences of these students. These insights can be used to understand and make meaning of their perspectives and how they impact decision-making. With this understanding, minority student decisions are more than isolated data points. Instead, qualitative inquiry allows this information to tell a story about the personal and educational experiences manifested in their decision-making about the IBDP. It tells us about who they are and what it is that they desire. Qualitative inquiry is the only methodological approach that allows hearing directly from the students to give voice to their unique perspectives and experiences related to IB program enrollment.

In the following description, I share my research design to include my sampling methods, data collection procedures, and data analysis approach. This description includes the methods to ensure the trustworthiness of my research and the research's limitations.

Sample Selection

My target population was all 9th grade minority students (African American, Hispanic, Multi-Racial) at my study site who were eligible to apply for the IB program for the 2020-2021 school year. Because I sought to gain in-depth information about their experiences, it was not feasible for me to obtain this information from every student invited to apply for the program. Instead, I conducted focus groups of six African American and Hispanic students from each of the following groups: (a) students who were eligible to apply, applied, and who were admitted and entered the IBDP, and (b) students who were eligible to apply, and students who were eligible for the IBDP but did not apply.

When identifying students to participate, they needed to represent the overall sample population. To ensure that all student groups were represented, I used a purposive convenience sampling of students. A purposive convenience sample included all socioeconomic levels present in the sampling frame, represented a range of middle schools attended by participants, gender, and included a range of achievement levels. This strategy also would increase the credibility of results.

Due to the impact of COVID-19, I worked closely with 9th grade English Language Arts teachers to identify students interested and willing to participate. Teachers presented the opportunity to participate to all 9th grade African American and Hispanic students who met the criteria. Of those students, teachers approached individual students whom they thought might be willing based on their knowledge of the students. Gathering a sufficient number of student

participants proved challenging as it took several weeks for teachers to confirm student participation through parent consent and student assent forms.

This challenge, in part, was related to the sporadic attendance imposed by the hybrid model of school. Of the twelve participating students, eleven were attending schools in the building, while the twelfth student was attending virtually on a full-time basis. I also conducted in-depth interviews of a subset of six parents, three parents from each of the focus groups. These parents self-identified as being interested through the consent forms distributed to students. These interviews were included in the research design to provide an additional perspective of how student decisions regarding participation in the IBDP are shaped.

In order to gather the information needed for this study, it was essential to obtain both parental consent and parental and student assent for this research. Any research involving children is subject to parental approval. For my research, it was equally important to gain students' participation agreement. This step followed appropriate research protocol, underscored the importance of student's voices, and helped build student confidence in me as the researcher and the research process. To obtain parental consent, students who fit within the sampling frame and identified in collaboration with the teaching staff received a letter describing my research and its goals through their English Language Arts and study skills classes. This letter invited parents and students to participate in the research and invited them to reach out to me via phone or email to gain more information.

Consent and assent forms were sent home to families via the student as an attachment to the invitation letter. These documents were also sent to them via email as a follow-up to the initial correspondence. Participants and their parents received the option to mail in the form, submit it online with an electronic signature, fax it, return it to the designated teacher, or they

could hand the form to me. As appropriate, families received follow-up phone calls, emails, and teacher reminders to request participation until I reached an appropriate sample size.

Data Collection

I chose to conduct focus group phenomenological interviews and in-depth individual phenomenological interviews as my data collection methods. Phenomenological interviews aim to evoke a personal account of the lived experience through an interactive process (Patton, 2015). One of my primary goals for this research was to enable students' voices.

The use of focus groups served several purposes. The first purpose was to assist students in building a comfort level with the process and the questions. This activity was even more important due to my position as a school employee and administrator. When there are several students in the room or group, students may feel less pressure to speak and may be enabled to speak by sharing ideas and experiences. This sharing of thoughts provided the opportunity to identify similarities and differences between students as well as explore a variety of themes and topics. The focus groups provided a broad view of factors that informed student decisions.

These in-depth group interviews allowed an opportunity for students to be heard and to share their experiences as they understand them or for the researcher to enter the "inner world" of the participants (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). In-depth individual interviews provided the opportunity to understand parents' experiences when they were making decisions and allowed me to ensure I captured the clarity of their thoughts (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The information gathered through the interviews was documented in a concrete, accurate manner and reflective of their thoughts and feelings. The level of detail needed to represent these experiences was not possible through any other data collection method.

The interview format for the student focus groups and the parent interviews was semi-structured. I used a predetermined interview protocol based on previous research and literature about the topic. The design provided structure and direction for the interviews and provided room for probing and follow-up questions that extended the conversation parameters to include information important to the participants. Participants had the opportunity to share information with minimal influence. A semi structured interview also provided for “comparability” between the interviews and facilitated data analysis by providing information centered around common themes (Patton, 2015). The interviews’ goal was to ensure that the participants’ information was authentic and created a narrative about their experiences.

The nature of the questions for the student groups was rooted in the following themes: (a) the degree to which the parents were involved in the decision-making process; (b) student reactions to the invitation to apply; (c) beliefs and thoughts about the program before application; (d) information learned through the recruitment and application process; (e) what students want from their high school experience; (f) student beliefs about program benefits; (g) student beliefs about the drawbacks of the program; (h) previous educational experiences and its part in decision making; and (i) other factors considered. These themes were constructed based on the literature on minority students and accelerated program enrollment. The interview protocol used for each group appears in Appendix A. It is important to note that although there was guidance in the form of the interview protocol, I was open to exploring topics and themes presented by the participant relevant to their decision-making. Flexibility and openness to adapting the process were essential in showing the participants that what they think is important, and this openness validated their thoughts and feelings. This approach helped build rapport and trust during the interview process.

Participants were encouraged to provide descriptive responses to the questions, including details about their emotional and physical responses. I posed each question to the entire group allowing students to volunteer to speak. However, I checked in with each student to ensure they had the opportunity to answer the question if they chose. This process ensured that no one student voice was dominant but still gave students the option to choose to respond. This questioning process allowed me to demonstrate that every student's voice was important and needed to be heard. Follow-up questioning and probing helped elicit responses that included this type of detail and gathered more data from each student. To ensure the accuracy of the information, I often repeated what I had heard from students or paraphrased their answers to ensure my understanding's accuracy. When necessary, students confirmed or clarified my expression of their thoughts.

It is important to note that my focus Group 2 interview encountered a technical problem that caused the full interview not to be recorded properly. For this group, I conducted a second interview when students were available to reconvene. This second interview only included four of the original six students due to COVID quarantine for one student and the other's unavailability. The notes and video from the first meeting were sufficient to ensure that all students were represented in my data and findings.

The parent interviews focused on similar themes, including (a) the degree to which the parents were involved in the decision-making process; (b) parent and student reactions to the invitation to apply; (c) beliefs and thoughts about the program before application; (d) information learned through the recruitment and application process; (e) what parents want for their students' future; (f) parent beliefs about program benefits; (g) parent beliefs about the drawbacks of the program; (h) the degree of input student had in the decision-making process.

These questions helped me understand the decision-making process and the degree to which both students and the parents are involved. The parent interviews were also valuable in identifying potential similarities and differences between parents and students and how those perspectives may have impacted enrollment decisions.

Data Analysis

To make sense of the information gathered through the in-depth interviews, I recorded the data in a way that was easy to reference. In qualitative research, coding is used as a means to organize the data gathered. The primary coding methodology employed was *structural coding* or *holistic coding*, which is described as coding that “applies a content-based or conceptual phrase” (Saldana, 2009, p. 66). This type of coding can be connected directly with the research question and ensures a direct correlation. This coding methodology is also considered *first cycle coding* (Saldana, 2009), indicating that it is part of the initial data analysis phases.

First cycle coding was how I recorded notes and reviewed student and parent interviews to get a general sense of the interviews’ themes. However, coding is a cyclical process that requires continuous review and synthesis of data. As this process continued and data was collected, I made use of in vivo or literal coding. Saldana (2009) described in vivo as useful for capturing the participant’s voice, particularly in studies involving youth. This methodology produced codes that used the students’ exact language, providing for the authenticity of the student’s voice. This type of coding emerged through the use of inductive analysis, which “allows meaningful dimensions to emerge from the patterns found in the cases under study, without presupposing in advance what those important dimensions will be” (Patton, 2015, p. 122). This coding allowed me as the researcher to remain open to topics and themes not

previously identified. By analyzing participants' initial responses to the interview protocol and responses to the follow-up questions, I derived the themes that emerged during the interviews.

The questions used in the interview protocol were constructed based on themes identified from the literature search. Because previous research had identified these themes as necessary in the area that I am studying, it was beneficial to employ deductive analysis. The deductive analysis allowed me to determine “the extent to which qualitative data in a particular study support existing general conceptualizations, explanations, results, and/or theories” (Patton, 2015, p. 790). Although I am interested in understanding experiences from the student perspective, I am also interested in aligning these experiences with current research. For this reason, I applied themes identified in the literature as the basis for *a priori* codes or codes developed prior to data collection. Topics that emerged from the literature included: previous coursework to prepare for accelerated programs (Burriss & Garrity, 2008; Whiting & Ford, 2009), formal and informal expectations of family and teachers (Kettle & Hurst, 2017), lack of understanding of the program and its benefits (Backes et al., 2014), school and family support (Kyburg et al., 2007; Suldo et al., 2018), student self-efficacy (Uwah et al., 2008), and academic self-concept (Wilson et al., 2014). The data analysis process allowed for the inclusion of codes based on familiar themes and aided in developing codes that were not directly identified in current literature.

My initial coding was based on three broad categories of *a priori* parent codes. These included access, sources of influence, and student beliefs. Because these categories were broad, for each category, I developed child codes. For access, child codes included previous coursework and tracking. Sources of influence included peer influence, parental expectations, teacher influence, available supports, and social status. The final category of student beliefs included

child codes to identify perceived benefits, perceived drawbacks, and student self-concept. The following table provides a listing and description of these initial codes.

Table 1

A Priori Codes

Parent Code	Description	Child Codes
1. Access (ACC)	These experiences are comprised of the student reflections about their prior and current experience with learning in school.	1a. Prior preparation 1b. Level of difficulty/challenge 1c. Workload 1d. Effort 1e. Resources and support
2. Sources of Influence (SI)	People or things described by the students and parents as contributing to their experience with or beliefs about the program.	2a. Parents 2b. Friends/Peers 2c. Self/Student 2d. Teachers/counselors
3. Beliefs about the program (KB)	Student's knowledge and beliefs about the program's impact on their academic, social and emotional well-being.	3a. Perceived benefits 3b. Perceived drawbacks

Each focus group interview and the individual interview was recorded via online conference software, including Zoom and Microsoft Teams, and documented by notes taken during the interview. When possible, I notated when one of the a priori themes was discussed and identified any emergent themes. It was important for me to develop a notetaking system that enabled me to take notes in shorthand to ensure that I gave adequate attention to the participants and so that neither they nor I were distracted by my notetaking. Recording the interviews assisted with this challenge; however, it was important for me to have the ability to take meaningful notes

that allowed me to ask appropriate follow-up questions and permitted exploration during data analysis. This notetaking process proved useful when I encountered technical issues with one of my recordings. Although I was able to reconvene the group, I used my notes to guide the interview and confirm the data previously collected.

Soon after each interview, I analyzed the data to find patterns in the interviews and participant responses using the coding methods described previously. The qualitative data management program, Dedoose, was used to facilitate the data analysis and organization. There were multiple rounds of coding to consolidate and better understand the themes that emerged from the data. Interviews and notes were labeled and dated. Patton (2015) noted that when coding, it is important to look at *convergence*, how things fit together and *divergence*, or how the information differs. This advice helped my analysis as it facilitated my ability to identify patterns and support the coding strategy or revealed revisions or changes to the coding strategy. Using both inductive and deductive methods to analyze the information gathered from the in-depth interviews helped me develop a comprehensive understanding of the patterns and themes related to minority decision-making about attending an acceleration program.

The coding and data analysis process resulted in the emergence of four primary themes described by the participants. These themes were (a) workload and stress, (b) social relationships, (c) family influence, and (d) access to information. The information shared within these themes represents what was most important to students and their families. While the data revealed that other beliefs represented by the a priori codes did exist, they lived within the overarching ideals represented by the four primary themes. In Chapter 4, I share my findings and the relevance of these themes on students' decision-making.

Trustworthiness

For the data collection and analysis, it was essential to establish my research's trustworthiness or reliability and validity. To assist with this, I chose a research methodology widely accepted in social science (Shenton, 2004). These methods included the use of a phenomenological approach, purposive convenience sampling, and coding methodology. My credibility is also related to my knowledge of the topic. My experience as an administrator of 15 years in an IB program and my training as an IB educator demonstrated my expertise in this area.

Further, I asked the participants to participate in member checks. *Member checks* allow participants to check the accuracy of the data recorded from their interviews and my interpretation of that data's meaning (Shenton, 2004). This process included observations of participant behavior and comparing my observations against participant response. I used *constant comparison* (Patton, 2015) to check the consistency of the methods used and looked for similarities and differences. This method can expose inconsistencies in work done, allowing the research to be revised as necessary. Data triangulation uses multiple data points to ensure the identified themes are analyzed through various ways and sources. I accomplished this step through the student and parent interviews, the recordings, note-taking, and the literature search. These multiple perspectives reduced potential bias introduced through participants and the observer.

It was essential to ensure that possible variations on themes and interpretations were considered (Patton, 2015). Based on the themes identified, the findings recognize that these themes and their meanings were interpreted differently by the two student groups and their families. This presentation allows those who read this study the opportunity to decide what they believe based on the evidence presented and "adds credibility by showing the analyst's authentic

search for what makes most sense rather than marshalling all the data toward a single conclusion” (Patton, 2015, p. 948).

Limitations

The primary limitation of this study was my involvement as a researcher. My current role at the school is that of Assistant Principal. This role is an authoritative role, where my responsibilities include the supervision of teachers, student discipline, and the IB program. Additionally, the impact of COVID-19 further complicated this role by requiring me to be briefly responsible for student grades. I had to overcome the stigma of that authority to get students to participate and be open about their experiences. Students may have been afraid of saying something “wrong” that they could have believed would somehow have a negative impact on them or others. The students interviewed were new students to the school, thus minimizing preconceived impressions about the researcher. However, the delay in the research’s commencement could allow students to begin to view me in a certain light.

Nevertheless, I made a substantial effort to build rapport to help mitigate these fears. I ensured that their participation was voluntary by removing myself from participants’ recruitment as much as possible. My initial contact came after they had agreed to participate. Once in contact with the students, I explained the study’s purpose and the nature of the questions that I would ask. I again confirmed that they wanted to participate and let them know that they could decline at any point. During the interviews, I affirmed their responses in my spoken and body language and allowed them to speak freely about the school ensuring there would be no repercussions if their comments were unfavorable or unflattering towards the school or school personnel.

I have a great deal of experience in my school and with the IB program, so I also had to work to suspend my judgments. My experiences at this research site and with the IB program

informed my thoughts about this topic. It was important for me to listen carefully and get as much detail as possible from the students and parents and not attribute my thoughts and interpretations to the participants.

Summary

The proceeding portions of this section have provided a detailed description of my investigative approach. This approach included a purposive convenience sampling methodology, phenomenological in-depth interviewing for data collection, and structural and in vivo coding to record and analyze the data collected. The use of the investigative design ensured that I gained information relevant to my research question and provided for the inclusion of student voices.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND DISSEMINATION PLAN

An educational system responsive to its students' needs is vital to ensuring that all students can reach their full potential. Such a system's success is evidenced by students' ability to succeed in postsecondary study and the job market. Research shows participation in high school acceleration programs prepares students to meet the demands of postsecondary study and, by extension, the demands of the labor market through the development of essential skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and self-management (Flowers, 2008; Jaffe & Lee, 2011; Martinez & Klopott, 2005; Strauss, 2015). Despite this research and the wide availability of acceleration programs such as the IB program (Theokis & Saaris, 2013), in schools that serve minority students, participation by African American and Hispanic students lags behind that of their Caucasian and Asian peers resulting in reduced postsecondary outcomes (Backes et al., 2014). Gaining insight into student decision-making related to participation in available acceleration programs is essential to a broader understanding of African American and Hispanic students' representation in these programs and their future postsecondary outcomes.

The purpose of this Dissertation in Practice is to develop an understanding of minority students' experiences and learn how minority students make their decisions regarding enrollment in the IBDP, emphasizing why eligible minority students may choose not to participate. Developing this understanding provided an insight into minority students' IB program access and participation in an urban school district.

This study's context was in a dedicated magnet high school in a large urban school district in Florida. The school only offers two academic tracks: Honor/AP and the IB program. A

purposive convenience sampling of twelve students in two categories provided the data for this study. Students who were (a) eligible to apply, applied, and admitted and entered the IBDP and (b) students eligible to apply for the IBDP but did not apply were interviewed in a semistructured virtual interview. To support and further explore student decision-making, I conducted six individual parent interviews with parents from each student category.

This methodological approach design solicited detailed information to answer the following research question:

What factors do minority students identify as important when making enrollment decisions for an International Baccalaureate Diploma Program (IBDP)?

This chapter will share the findings from the parent and student interviews, the implications of these findings, my recommendations for school districts and schools, and how I will disseminate this information to a wide range of stakeholders.

Findings

Two student focus groups and six parent interviews were conducted for this study. These student groups included African American and Hispanic students at the study site. The first group of six students comprised those students who applied for and have commenced participation in the IB program at Magnet High School. The second group of six students was eligible to apply for the IB program but chose not to apply. For each group of students, I conducted three parent interviews. Students in this study have received pseudonyms to protect their privacy. These pseudonyms with demographic details appear in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2

Group 1: Students Who Applied for and Are Participating in the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program at Magnet High School

Student	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Middle School	Parent Interviewed
Ann	African American	Female	Private Catholic	Yes
Cathy	Hispanic	Female	Public Comprehensive	No
Daisy	African American	Female	Public Magnet	Yes
Jillian	African American	Female	Public Charter	No
Michael	Hispanic	Male	Public Magnet	Yes
Thomas	African American	Male	Public Charter	No

Table 3

Group 2: Students Who Were Eligible but Did Not Apply for the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program at Magnet High School

Student	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Middle School	Parent Interviewed
Ashley	African American	Female	Public Magnet	Yes
Jonathan	African American	Male	Public Magnet	Yes
Liza	African American	Female	Public Magnet	Yes
Maria	Hispanic	Female	Public Magnet	No
Nicole	African American	Female	Public Magnet	No
Tara	African American	Female	Public Magnet	No

Students participating in this study came from a range of backgrounds and prior academic experiences. Students in Group 1, those currently participating in the IB program, came from

diverse middle school backgrounds, such as private schools, public charter, and a college preparatory-themed magnet school for students attending magnet schools and one with a focus on the arts. Students in Group 2, in contrast, came from three different dedicated magnet schools, two of which had a college preparatory-theme and the third school with a gender theme. It is interesting to note that in both student groups, except for one student, all families took advantage of the district's school choice options in their educational decisions before high school.

Families continued to explore their options when deciding to attend Magnet High School. Each family represented in the focus groups had two options. The first option to gain entry into the high school was to apply to enter the school's IB program. Students in Group 1 and Group 2 were eligible to apply for the IB program as they all met the entrance criteria. Entry to the IB program is merit-based, and points are assessed according to standardized test scores and grades. Participants in Group 1 expressed their desire to take on this program by applying to be a part of the IB program and subsequently received entry to the school as IB program participants. Students in Group 2, though eligible, chose not to apply.

The second entry option available to families was to apply through the school district's school choice lottery system, with Algebra 1 being the sole entry requirement. Although students in Group 2 were also eligible for option 1—application to the school's IB program—they declined to apply and instead chose to enter the school through the second option—application through the magnet lottery. This route confirmed their interest in participating in the school's honors and AP programs.

IB Program: The Status and Reputation

Before discussing the factors that shaped the participants' decision to join the IB program or not, it is important to note how students in both groups described their initial feelings of

validation upon being notified that they were eligible. The IB program has a reputation of being intended for the students with the highest scores and academic performance. An invitation to the program signals to students that they are among the best students academically in their district.

For example, Daisy in Group 1 expressed:

I was pretty excited because I worked really hard in middle school to get those, to have applications sent to me, so I worked really hard. I was excited so it was nice to see that my hard work paid off because I was eligible for it.

For Daisy, although she was confident in the efforts she had made towards being a top student, this formal notice of her eligibility confirmed for her that the work she put forth to ensure she was able to take advantage of opportunities such as the IB program paid off and that others took note of her efforts as a student.

Similarly, Tara, a student in Group 2, reflected on her academic experience in middle school, noting she “made A’s and B’s and depending on the class it would be C’s. For me school wasn’t always easy...” This reflection helped other students in Group 2 understand how she perceived her abilities and why she described her eligibility for the IB program as somewhat surprising. In her description of her reaction, she shared:

Wow, I must be smart, smart. It was kind of weird because I said let me go ask my friends to see if any of them got in and they were like no, I never got that letter and I’m like okay, that’s different. It was kind of different because I had never gotten something like that, I was never like a gifted student so for them to send me that letter I felt a little special.

As described by Tara, not only was the notice of her eligibility significant to her realization of her capabilities, it provided a realization of her academic standing among her friends and peers, allowing her to feel unique and special.

These feelings of validation were fostered by the belief that students must be “smart” to receive an invitation based on the district criteria of test scores and grades. It is important to note here that the International Baccalaureate Organization, the organization that administers the program globally, does not impose any entry criteria. Instead, they emphasize the rigorous nature of their courses and how their curriculum and process prepare students for college and beyond. Due to limited capacity, the school district has chosen to impose strict academic requirements to determine program access.

Student perception of the invitation was also cultivated by the culture in their school district’s choice and the transition to high school. Each year, the school district sends thousands of letters to eligible middle school students notifying students and their families about the high school programs they qualify for, thus, broadening their high school options and future possibilities. For many students and their schools, the anticipation of receiving a letter is a conversation topic, fueling speculation about who will receive invitations. When the letters arrive, there is a culture that celebrates students who have received invitations; celebrations often led by school personnel such as teachers and counselors. Additionally, because this district has an expansive school choice system and friend groups often diverge based on their choices, there is a comparison between peers and friends regarding these invitations. Students begin to explore what their next stage of education may look like and who in their current circle may go on that journey with them. This process is part of the cultural fabric of the middle school experience, and

students in both groups in this research study wanted to be included in the conversation and celebration.

The comments shared by both student groups demonstrate a commonality in how it felt to be recognized. Students shared an underlying belief that an invitation to be a part of the IB program was flattering and an affirmation of their academic abilities. Even so, ultimately, student decisions about program participation were driven by several other factors. In the following sections, I present the factors that contributed to each group's decision-making, sharing how and why they came to their final decision to participate or not participate in the IB program despite feeling excited about receiving an invitation to join the program.

Workload and Stress

As much as the invitation to apply for the IB program was validating for students and parents, conversations around the perception of workload revealed even more about student and parental values and concerns about undertaking the accelerated work as presented by their understanding of the IB Diploma Program. More importantly, these conversations unveiled some of the differences between what drove students' and parents' decisions in Group 1 and Group 2. These conversations evoked strong emotional responses regarding the potential impact on students. One of the messages they heard most often concerned the program's difficulties. However, how students in Group 1 and Group 2 viewed the challenges presented by the perceived workload and stress was central to how they arrived at different decisions.

It is important to note that the notion of a heavier workload in the IB program is one of the perceptions that might apply differently for different students. The IB program does not prescribe a certain amount of work but provides guidance on the skills and activities to engage students. Each school takes this information and puts it into practice. Some students viewed the

challenge presented by these activities as more work. Conversations with students and parents did not provide evidence of an increased amount of work, but rather, opinions were built on the perception of more work. It is through this lens that I will discuss how this idea manifested in decision-making. In the following sections, I share how each group processed these messages and how they influenced student decisions.

Group 1

Students in Group 1 previously heard about the difficulties of the program and the workload. Thomas described the idea formed in his mind based on how the program and its workload recounted by his cousin, who participated in the program at another school, as being like “a scary movie.” His description represents the fear that he and others felt when presented with the idea that the workload that comes with the IB program is daunting and possibly insurmountable. Even so, for students in Group 1, while they acknowledged the challenge and the difficult road ahead, the response to this drawback was manifested as an overwhelming sense of triumph and a belief that they could overcome the program’s workload challenges and in overcoming these challenges, they would receive certain benefits.

They all had different motivations for pursuing the IB route, some abstract and some practical. Some students believed that they needed to learn the program for themselves instead of listening to others. Group 1 participant, Jillian, described an encounter with a middle school counselor:

She would come and talk to us about IB. She made it sound like if we got a ‘D’ we would be complete failures; we couldn’t go to college. I was expecting it to be like bad. I thought it was going to be hard and thinking, should I really be doing this?

Jillian told the group that although counselors and others told her about the program's many challenges, she needed to gain her own understanding. With the encouragement of her mentor, Jillian decided that she "wanted to see for herself." There was also an acknowledgment that those who offered negative opinions may not be informed by facts but were informed by those individuals' personal opinions. Students in Group 1 wanted to experience the program and did not let others' opinions distract them from their goals.

For some, participation and taking on the program's challenges was about self-fulfillment and exploration. Students in Group 1 longed for the sense of accomplishment that participating and completing an IB program could bring. Cathy affirmed these sentiments by offering:

I know I can do this. I can stay up and do all the homework. It is up to me if it is hard...I can do this, its fine, I can do this...AP, I was always told was much easier than IB, but I told myself I am not doing school for it to be easy. I am not trying for a scholarship for it to be easy. I never thought any of this was going to be easy. It is up to me to get everything done, to keep moving forward and to just get everything together.

Cathy's comments confirm a potential struggle with the workload and articulate the acceptance of the challenge that struggle presents. Accepting this challenge would allow her and other members of Group 1 to face bigger challenges down the road. For students in Group 1, the challenges presented will have long-term benefits as they pursue their college goals.

More practically, students and parents in Group 1 saw the program and the workload as preparing them for college. Research confirms that acceleration programs such as the IBDP enhances college readiness and postsecondary outcomes for participating students (Roderick et al., 2009). Research commissioned by the International Baccalaureate Organization (2018) shares that the IB program's benefits extend beyond other accelerated programs. This research

found that students who participate in the program increased college readiness scores, such as the ACT and SAT, and increased the probability of enrolling in college and university. The research demonstrated that IB graduates experience higher university graduation rates than all other students. Students and families in Group 1 viewed the IB program and the work that came with it as an integral factor in their preparation and acceptance into college. Jillian shared:

I did (the program) it anyway because I knew that IB would give me...better college choices, it would just be better for me in the long run than AP would, since some of the colleges that I have been looking at are international. I have been thinking a lot about it. I could get into more colleges, even internationally, because of IB.

This explanation, provided by Jillian, expressed the belief that IB could expand the postsecondary choices available to participating students because colleges and universities are familiar with the preparation that IB provides. The reference to international colleges and universities was a great illustration of this point. Because the IB program is international, its credentials are well-known globally and provide attendance eligibility for students who may not otherwise be eligible due to varying curriculum and criteria across different parts of the world. This type of portability and international recognition is a unique benefit compared to other programs available in the United States. This benefit gives students in Group 1 an additional reason to persevere despite the perceived workload's challenges.

Parents of students in Group 1 also looked to the long-term benefits of the program. Ann's mom understood that the preparation given was vital to Ann's ability to not only go on to postsecondary education but a means to finance this costly endeavor. Ann's mom explained:

I wanted her to go to school without having that financial burden.... if you end up with all this debt you have to pay back, a lot of times your life is restricted for so many years.

Along with this explanation, she shared that she often tells Ann that if you “work hard now, you can play later,” meaning that Ann putting forth the effort in the program now, it would yield benefits in her future and reduce possible financial hardships that could result from educational debt. Scholarship opportunities through program participation represent a tangible benefit to Group 1 students and their parents in the present and the near future. The scholarships represent families’ opportunity to capitalize on college admission benefits by eliminating or greatly reducing attendance costs. Additionally, this reduced cost of attendance would allow for greater financial freedom for participating students after completing their postsecondary education and entering the job market.

For students and parents in Group 1, their discussion highlighted that their goals and priorities extend beyond the immediate concerns about the IB’s workload. They all found different motivations for pursuing the program, including self-discovery, character building, and college preparation opportunities. Ultimately, they looked further into their future, understanding that their decisions now have consequences for them later in life. These reasons prevented the workload from being a deterrent to participation in the IB program.

Group 2

Overwhelmingly, for students in Group 2, the perceived drawback of a large workload and stress weighed most prominently when declining the program. While these students and their families acknowledged some benefits of the IB program, such as college readiness and admissions, these benefits could not surmount the challenge presented by the perceived workload and accompanying stress. For these students and their families, this perception was real and validated by peers’ experience or by the experiences of those close to them.

Tara gave an example of the communication she received from peers sharing, “I have two friends who are in IB, and they told me it is not easy and they have more work than we do in the AP program.” When asked how her friends who were participating in IB were aware of the AP program’s workload, she shared that they knew it by talking to their friends who were in AP. This peer-to-peer exchange illustrates that students in Group 2 placed a high value on their peers’ opinions. This reliance on peers’ opinions indicates that Group 2 participants trust their peers, signifying peer relevance when students in this Group make their decisions. For parents in Group 2, the idea of workload was more personal. Ashley’s mom shared an experience of her older child:

So, because I have experience with the older child, one night he was up late and it was very late, I think it was his math class and he was really, really tired, and he needed to finish this assignment and he was a freshman. And I said to him go to bed, I don’t care...is this really worth it for him? The answer is no...high school is not the time for that.

This experience served as the turning point in her perspective of IB. In the opinion of Ashley’s mom, the pressure presented by the workload did not have a benefit that justified allowing her son to have an experience that she perceived interfered with his ability to enjoy high school.

While Ashley’s mom’s anecdote alluded to an impact on her student’s overall well-being, it was Liza’s mom who spoke to the perceived stress of the program directly, saying:

I think that it’s a lot of work and sometimes I think it is overwhelming to the student. What concerned me was the amount of extra work that she would have to do...my concern is the mental aspect to the child.

The question that arises is what specific impact on mental health concerns her? Liza's mom shared that for her older student, she tends to internalize and overthink. These tendencies can make the student view herself harshly and subsequently can impact her confidence and self-esteem. Other Group 2 parents shared this opinion. These personal accounts of the workload of IB were enough to help these students and families determine that it presented unnecessary pressure on their older students. This pressure, they believed, had the potential to take a toll on student lives.

Another way in which they believed the workload could impact student lives was through their high school experience. For the students and their families in Group 2, there is a belief that high school is a time where students should enjoy themselves. Ashley described the program as a "harder time sacrifice and time commitment." This sacrifice presented a concern that she would not be able to participate in sports and other extracurricular activities that she was not willing to give up. Tara elaborated, expressing the fear of what program participation might do for her high school experience, declared that she "wanted to enjoy high school and was afraid I could not with IB." These statements support the belief in the popular rumor that students cannot have a life in IB. These students were not only afraid that they would have less time to do what they wanted, they believed that the program would prevent them from enjoying all of the things that high school had to offer, a risk that they were not willing to take.

While students and parents in Group 2 expressed concerns related to workload and stress in the IB program, they briefly acknowledged that the IB program could benefit some students. While Ashley's mom described IB as being a "notch up" from the AP program, as it relates to college readiness and preparation, this elevated preparation in her eyes was not significantly

advantageous for her student as she believed her student had college opportunities regardless of the program explaining:

Honestly, when you go to school, when you go to your college, depending upon the college that you go to, they don't even acknowledge it, so what's the point of it? So you have to go back and say, it gives you the edge, it gives you the edge to be competitive. Okay, but if I make good grades, don't I have the edge anyway?... yes, it's a great program, but is it of value to my children...If they go to an HBCU it doesn't matter. An HBCU is going to accept them no matter what.

This position shows that for this family, although the program provided benefits in the way of college readiness and admissions, they did not perceive them as unique and therefore did not sway her family in favor of IB based on goals established for Ashley by her parents. Ashley's parents, both college-educated, and her older sibling, a current college student, all went to college without an IB education. Other students and their parents echoed this sentiment. They believed that students can get a good education in IB or outside of it and still go on to the college or university of their choice. Therefore, although students and families in Group 2 felt IB was a good program, it was not the only route to success, and they did not believe the difference it could make to their future outcomes was significant.

Students and families in Group 2 believed that the workload and stress of IB were not worth the sacrifice of students' mental and emotional health, was not justified in the time required to participate, and feared the impact it would have on other factors in high school. They did not believe the program provided them any greater opportunities for college admissions. In other words, the drawbacks of the perceived workload and stress far exceeded what they believed to be meager benefits of program participation.

Social Relationships

For students and families in Group 1 and Group 2, relationships with friends and within the school environment were a critical component of their existence and, thus, their decision making. However, how these relationships impacted this decision-making represented another divergence point for students and families in Groups 1 and 2. The following discussion illustrates how social relationships were viewed by each group, giving additional insight into why they did or did not enroll in the IB program.

Group 1

Students and parents alike in Group 1 shared a vital aspect of program participation, and a function of school, in general, was the development of meaningful relationships. They recognized and were receptive to the new relationships fostered as a member of the IB program. This point was illustrated in the belief that IB provided a small cohort that allowed students to develop meaningful relationships with other students and teachers. Students in the cohort would take the same classes and have the same instructors, developing a shared experience. Students in Group 1 viewed these potential relationships in a role of support. This support functioned to help them overcome high school challenges. Thomas describes how this happens:

I feel that forming relationships in general, like having that bond with your teachers...yes school is important because you need to learn but also like making friends that are struggling with you...Just having my friends is always nice....and also teachers, making bonds with them because they know the work they are giving you is hard...I think it is a better experience.

For students and families in Group 1, there was the impression that their participation could help facilitate the desired relationships due to the program's nature. These relationships

would be developed by a bond of shared experiences of trials and accomplishments. This sharing of experiences provided a group of people who understood what it was like to be in the program and could therefore offer help, encouragement, and support. Consequently, these relationships facilitate student progress in the program.

Beyond the benefits these relationships could have for their success in the IB program, students in Group 1 viewed friendships as vital to their overall well-being and sense of belonging. Cathy articulated this point by stating:

Honestly, friends are the best part of school. My whole reason for going to school was just to be with my friends. It made me laugh, it made my mood better...friends improve your experience with school in general, it makes you less stressed. Even if you aren't stressed, it just gives you somebody to talk to, a shoulder to lean on.

Through their discussion, the students in Group 1 recognized that their social relationships were important to their success in the program and their development as people. Participation in the program allowed for the opportunity to develop friendships that went beyond the academic commonalities, helping their high school experience be enjoyable.

While having friendships was viewed as necessary for matriculating through the program and high school, students also considered that the friendships developed while in the program could endure beyond high school. Jillian discussed how making friends was challenging for her; however, she believed that the development of friendships in high school was one of the last opportunities to develop deep bonds before college. Jillian explained:

Having friendships is important. This is important because these are our last years to build a bond because once we get in college it will be way different in making friends because we will all be adults. You want to have those people already that you can go to.

Jillian's comments suggest that building friendships is not easy but essential to her. The IB program and cohort model was viewed as making this process a little easier by grouping students together throughout high school. Further, the relationships developed had the potential to be lasting and could carry over into college and adulthood.

While the students in Group 1 focused on the added benefit of forming new relationships within the program, they did not see the program as preventing them from maintaining their current relationships or developing friendships outside of the program. Students in Group 1 were either participating in activities such as cheer and JROTC or had plans to be active in other school activities. They did not see the program as creating a scenario that required them to choose; rather, they saw it as having an overall positive effect on their lives, giving them a broader network of relationships.

As the students and parents in Group 1 understood that the program would bring challenges, it was important for them to have a support system, such as the cohort they would receive within the IB program. Knowing that the program was designed to foster these relationships and help them overcome potential hurdles provided another reason why this group believed IB participation was beneficial.

Group 2

While students and parents in Group 1 looked forward to developing new relationships, students and parents in Group 2 were primarily concerned about the status of their existing relationships. These students and families viewed the IB program as a potential interruption to the relationships they established or were hoping to establish. For them, IB would place constraints on the development of relationships. The cohort model, by design, limits the interactions with students outside of the cohort while in school. There is a common perception

that students in IB do not have a life. Students in Group 2 have heard this perception and did not want this to be their reality.

This feeling is evidenced by Maria, who was one of the quieter students during the interview. When we began to talk about the impact on relationships and social life, without hesitation, she offered, “I do feel like it will have an impact on my social life because I like going out with my friends...I take the spare time to do what I want to do.” This statement from Maria indicates the importance of the social aspects of school and life outside of school. For Maria, the anticipated time the IB program would require would be a reason that her social life is impacted. These thoughts are representative of the sentiments shared by her peers in Group 2.

Students believed that the requirements of IB would take away valuable time they reserved for their relationships and meaningful activities. Even so, the time factor alone is not the only concern. As stated by Ashley, students believed that program participation would make them a “bookworm,” indicating they would only have time for studying and work. This perception would paint them as having a particular personality and specific priorities. This perception, they believed, would be a mischaracterization of who they are as people, a mischaracterization that could impact their social life. Parents agreed with their students, believing that the program restrictions would not allow students to be wholly themselves.

The idea that students need to be who they are was prevalent among Group 2 participants and their parents. Ashley’s mom spoke to the program and school needing to be “the right fit” for her student. These thoughts and impressions were not based solely on what she believed, but what her student wanted for herself as she expressed to her mother that she was “not that type of kid.” Ashley’s mother explained:

Ashley was very concerned about being able to do the things she was interested in doing, she was very concerned. She had already made up in her mind some of the extracurricular things that she wanted to do that she felt was important and she thought that IB would interfere with that.

Ashley's mother explained that Ashley felt that a student in IB was only interested in school. On the other hand, Ashley had plans to not only excel in her studies but to be active in her extracurricular endeavors. Echoing this point, Liza's mom described the need for her student to fit into the social environment, "I want her to be surrounded with everything that she needed. I want to see her get more involved in the community...she is a social butterfly...every parent should take into consideration how they are going to fit in."

Her parents gave this understanding of Liza and how she preferred to interact socially significant consideration. They believed that if Liza could not be authentic to her own needs, she would not fully enjoy her experience and high school. While Liza's mother wanted her to be challenged, she felt that she could be challenged sufficiently outside of the IB program and fully pursue her social interests.

These students and their families were able to identify reasons why they felt the program was not compatible with how they wanted to interact socially while in high school. On the contrary, there was little consideration given to how they could continue to interact with friends outside of the program had they chosen to participate or the friends they can make within the program. During the discussion, these students spoke of friends currently in the IB program with whom they interact socially. By the example of these friendships, there was evidence that it is possible to maintain relationships outside the program, as these friends had done with them. Moreover, they appeared to be unaware of the program requirements that encourage and require

social interaction beyond the classroom. Students and parents' thought processes leaned towards deficit thinking as it related to the IB program and its effect on their relationships, regardless of the possibilities that existed to maintain and expand these relationships.

The concerns and perceptions regarding the impact on social relationships are a crucial concern for adolescents. Social relationships help foster a sense of belonging (O'Connor et al., 2011; Park et al., 2014) which is necessary, particularly for minority students, in helping them to achieve. Students in Group 2 did not believe that the belonging they desired was found in the IB program, consequently causing them to decline the program.

Family Influence

Each of the 12 students who participated in this research study shared that their parents gave them the option to choose whether they would participate in the IB program. The interviewed parents echoed this position as they confirmed that they allowed their students to have the final say regarding their IB participation. This sense of ownership of the decision-making process was necessary for students to be fully engaged in the chosen academic path and have ownership of their futures (Mameli et al., 2019). Although this decision was communicated as being the will of the student, these student decisions and the beliefs they were based upon were decisively shaped by their families' thoughts, feelings, experiences, and perceptions. These elements included family legacy, expectations, and knowledge of the program. The following discussion will reveal the role of the family in the decision to join IB.

Group 1

The interviews revealed that there was alignment in how students and parents described the decision-making process for IB. For students in Group 1, parent interviews highlighted the influence of family. For example, Michael and his mother both acknowledged that there was

“some pressure” on Michael to participate in the program based on another family member’s participation and success in IB. In Michael’s eyes, his brother was more academically talented than he was, and he expressed that this was a difficult role to fill. In Michael’s words, he stated:

For me, I felt like I was more, it was like pressured into it, that kind of thing. Um, at my house my brother set the bar for me and like I feel like I have to meet that expectation.

Michael’s mother, acknowledging that Michael felt that pressure, shared that she made an effort to let him know that she “wants him to be his own person.” Even so, there were expectations that included him being a part of a program that would help him excel and meet his future goals. For his parents, IB met this standard. For Michael, he did not want to disappoint his family or not live up to this standard of achievement. Although Michael received the option to choose to participate, his parents’ spoken and unspoken expectations helped to nudge him in the IB program’s direction.

The feedback collected from the parent interviews also revealed the influence between students and their families was not unidirectional, but that influence moved from family to student and from student to family. In the case of Daisy, her father shared, “When you know your child you have expectations for them and you really celebrate when you see that they have expectations for themselves.” In this family, there is a culture of high expectations for what they believed Daisy could achieve academically. This expectation is not only held by her parents but by Daisy herself. Daisy’s parents discussed Daisy’s drive and intense focus on her education. It was this drive that led her to IB. According to her mother and father, it was Daisy’s enthusiasm for the program that sold them on the idea of IB. Daisy’s mom recalled:

I had questions and inhibitions because I had heard about the workload and I wanted to make sure that she understood, you know the workload and the things that were going to

be involved... she was determined to explain to us the requirements of the program...this was something that she was adamant about, she basically sold it to us.

The exchange between Daisy and her parents demonstrates how the family culture related to academics becomes the student's culture. Likewise, Ann was greatly influenced by her parent's thoughts and expectations and by her family's needs. Initially, Ann had only been concerned about what school she would go to; it was Ann's mother that pushed her into considering the IB program and its future impact:

I really didn't know what program I wanted to be in...I was planning on going on to AP until my mom said you try IB and I said okay I will... If I actually went through the IB and got a diploma and everything, it would be easier. I would have more options in college and more options for scholarships and stuff like that.

Ann's thoughts were illuminated by her mother's discussion regarding the evolution of their choice for the IB program. Ann's mom shared how her previous experience as a substitute teacher in the IB program at Magnet High School led her to learn about the program and the benefits, including the possibility of scholarships. Ann's mom believed that her status as a single mother made the idea of affording college more difficult. The opportunities that the IB program presented could ease the financial burden of college on their family. Ann was very much aware of these feelings and became sold on the program's benefits for her family and her future.

Students in Group 1 made decisions to participate that were rooted in their families' beliefs and expectations regarding their future. For some, those beliefs were as simple as wanting students to participate in the best program available to them. For others, it was about meeting long-held expectations about what families wanted and believed their students could achieve.

This expectation and belief in the student's ability to be successful gave the support, encouragement, and sometimes pressure to select IB as the academic program for high school.

Group 2

For students in Group 2, the family's influence was just as critical, with family culture and expectations playing a role in how parents and students viewed the program. Families had expectations of what they believed their students should and could do both academically and socially. Students also wielded influence over their parents' thoughts and program perceptions. However, how this influence manifested led to students in Group 2 opting not to participate in the IB program.

Liza, who has a sibling who currently participates in the IB program, chose not to participate based on what she perceived to be her sister's experience, which included late nights doing homework. Liza shared that her sister believed that she "would not do the work." Her parent shared this assessment of Liza's will in the parent interview. Liza's mother described Liza as wanting to "take the easiest route." Although she understood this about her daughter, she believed that she was fully capable of undertaking rigorous coursework, but she did not want to risk Liza damaging her grades and GPA because she did not complete the required work. This belief in Liza's unwillingness to take on challenges became a part of the family narrative based on their knowledge and experiences with Liza. A narrative that Liza herself held to be true. Liza shared that she believed the experience she perceived her sister to have was not the right thing for her as she was afraid she would not do the work required. These conversations and existing family beliefs played a part in Liza's decision.

Ashley, who also had a sibling who participated in the program for a short time, based her decision on what she perceived to be her brother's experience. She recalled, "I looked at my

brother's experience. He would always stay up until [all] hours in the morning. So, personally, I always knew I was going to choose AP over IB." Even with this experience, unlike Liza, Ashley's sibling encouraged her not to rule out the IB program telling her that it could be a good thing for her. Ashley's brother, as well as her parents, believed that she could succeed if it was something she was committed to completing.

Even so, the interview with Ashley's mom supported the finding that this family held the belief that there was more to high school than IB and that this belief had been shared with Ashley through her sibling's experience. For Ashley, that experience and what she believed to be characteristic of what happens to students in the program, as witnessed through her brother, was not appealing. Ashley's mother explained, "there was no conversation that could take the sting away from that." Ashley's knowledge of her family belief system enabled her to appeal to her family's previously developed perceptions about the program to support her own position of not participating in the IB program. Her parents readily accepted this position.

As demonstrated by Ashley, like students in Group 1, families in Group 2 shared a communication pathway that allowed parents and students to influence each other. Liza's influence on her family went beyond what they believed about her personality and willingness to do the work. Liza actively campaigned not to participate in the program or attend the assigned school. Liza's mother described the exchange:

The main conversation was about being challenged, being informed. Liza went so far as the write to the superintendent about her choices...I didn't want to put her in IB because I didn't want her to become overwhelmed. AP is still rigorous and it was going to challenge her.

Liza's objections further solidified her family's opinions about the appropriate fit for Liza. More importantly, Liza's voice and her aversion to the program were undeniable in the final decision not to participate in the IB program.

For the students' families in Group 2, there was a concern about the program's potential impact on whom the families believed the students to be. In cases where they believed the program stretched them beyond their comfort zone, they did not lend their support. In other instances, when they believed the program would restrict or repress the students' personality or ambitions, they did not find it a good fit. Students in Group 2, as did students in Group 1, trusted their family assessment in determining what was best for them, leading to a decision to decline participation in the IB program.

The examples shared in the preceding discussion show that the parent and other family members' thoughts, beliefs, and experiences are significant. The families of these students know them best. This knowledge of the students and the students' knowledge of themselves, as it has developed in their family's cultural context, led students to make enrollment decisions that have their foundation in the family's beliefs.

Access to Information

My interviews with students and parents demonstrated that the sources from which they derived their information regarding the IB program were varied. These sources included formal sources such as the International Baccalaureate Organization website, the school website, and district and school information sessions. Informal information sources were also important in the decision-making process and included word of mouth, YouTube and social media, friends, and peers. The source and type of information received by students and parents served to promote or discourage program participation.

Group 1

Students and families in Group 1 accessed both informal and formal sources of information. For all of the students and families in this group, they accessed a formal information source, such as a school or district information session. Additional research using informal sources such as peers and the internet may have supplemented this information.

For Group 1, it was the formal information session provided by the school that made the difference. In describing his experience, Daisy's father mentioned that his interaction with a particular student during this session helped to convince him of the program's merits. He described his appreciation:

the student was extremely knowledgeable...allow them to tell their story. That will always be a winning formula. Don't craft it for them. Let them tell their story. I think that really helps young students like Daisy and the parents to make up their minds.

This example indicates Group 1 students' and parents' preference to hear accurate information and hear from those who have experienced the program directly. This family, like others, followed their formal pursuit of information with additional research to confirm or refute the information they heard about the program.

Thomas, who also visited the school, did research on his own to help him make a decision. As shared earlier in this discussion, he had heard frightening things about the program, but through his research of sources online such as YouTube, he concluded:

I saw how the people were, they had become better people because of IB. Seeing them as the person they are now, it makes it look like IB is preparing them as an adult...being challenged is a way to build your character I guess.

This confirmation of the program's long-term benefits and the possibility of what he could become led Thomas to choose IB.

Students and parents in Group 1 made a conscious decision to rely on resources, both formal and informal, that supported program participation. An essential action of participants in this group was their pursuit of this information. They actively sought resources to give them the understanding needed to make what they believed to be an informed decision. Through their discovery, they concluded that IB was indeed an appropriate choice.

Ann's mother provided the most extensive example of using formal presentations, independent research, and reliance on first-hand examples to inform the decision to choose IB.

I was exposed to the program and what the program was all about since Ann was in fifth grade, so I had a lot of time to work on it...I learned visualization... and picked up different information from different schools as I went along.

Ann's mother added that conversations with students and school personnel as well as the school presentation informed her knowledge of the program and its appropriateness for her student. She believed that understanding the program and the application process was complex. Therefore, she needed the time to understand the program fully. Without these resources and the time to understand them, she felt like her student could have missed out on the program's opportunities.

Group 2

Most of the parents and students in Group 2 shared that they also accessed formal and informal information sources. The formal sources of information accessed by students and their parents appeared to be more limited in nature, whereas the informal sources were more readily available and weighed more heavily in their decisions.

Parents of students in Group 2 shared a fundamental concern with information meaning and availability from formal sources. They were not entirely sure of the program's ultimate advantage in relation to other programs. They did not believe that the formal sources of information available to them, such as the school website and information brochures, adequately explained what was most important about the program.

Ashley's parent, who had a student who participated for a short time in the program, stated that the IB program's idea is not fully understood. She explained:

It gets lost in translation, the essence of the program, no one ever gets it out. No one ever says, ok, what does IB really mean...these kids look at it as if it is this thing, ok, so what does that mean?...What is the point?

She did not believe that people involved in the program, including school and district officials, communicated effectively or understood what made the program different and worthy. For these families, they had not heard of developing skills such as critical thinking and communication as central to the IB's goals. In their 2020 IB Global Conference, the organization speaks to helping students develop skills to solve problems that do not yet exist. This comment was made in part regarding the goal of IB to help students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, skills that they believe can be valuable in the future when new problems and challenges that have yet to be encountered occur. The absence of information that is at the core of the program was crucial in the decision-making process. If students and parents were unable to identify the program's goals, they could make a fully informed decision.

Jonathan's mom acknowledged that she did not participate in any of the available modes of information sharing but instead was looking for more of an effort to educate her on the program's merits. This statement demonstrates that for some families in Group 2, easily

accessible information, meaning they did not require a specific action to access, was important. Often the information that was most accessible came in the form of word-of-mouth communication, which often touted the program's drawbacks.

While Ashley and Jonathan's parents felt the information was lacking, Liza's mom expressed that she could go to various presentations and school tours that informed her about the program. However, she believed that the program was presented in a manner that caused concern:

We were concerned (about the mental toll) when we were trying to decide whether or not she was actually going to go into the program and all that they said was going to be involved. I was like okay...it was concerning...I was concerned about her actually doing the work.

Although Liza's mom felt that the program offered advantages, the program's formal presentation caused alarm about the workload and its impact on her student. Through her eyes, the information presentation left her with doubts and contributed to the family's decision not to enroll Liza.

A perceived lack of communication in the formal mechanisms of information access for participants in Group 2 and communication that highlighted perceived program deficits led to students and parents declining the program due to a lack of understanding. Additionally, this lack also made room for the prevalent informal information mechanisms to take root and dominate the discussion for these families, leading them to rely on what they heard more, believing that they should not participate in the IB program.

Summary

The previous discussion presented the factors shared by students and their parents that contributed to their IB program participation decision. Workload and stress, social relationships, family influence, and access to information were critically important in forming their decision to join IB. Though these factors were the same for both groups, how they perceived and processed the information differed.

For students in Group 1, while perceiving the workload to be an inevitable challenge of the program, they believed this challenge facilitated future opportunities. Group 2 participants, however, believed that the perceived workload and accompanying stress was unnecessary to achieve their future goals. IB, and its cohort model, was seen as facilitating and broadening the network of relationships available to students in Group 1, but an inhibition to students' desired relationships and social activities in Group 2. The influence of family encouragement and support for the program emerged from discussions with Group 1 members. With Group 2, families were resistant to the program, identifying reasons why it was not beneficial for students. Their access to information informed the beliefs of students and their families. Students and families in Group 1 relied more heavily upon formal information sources such as information provided by IB or schools to make their decisions.

Conversely, members of Group 2 viewed the more informal sources of information, such as peers. They believed that the formal sources of information were not easily accessible. These differences in perception, and ultimately differences in the program's utility for the students involved, shaped their final decisions. In the following sections, I describe the implications of these findings and provide recommendations to increase minority student enrollment in the IB program.

Implications

The IBDP is viewed as a prestigious program in the local context of this study. Although it has a reputation for preparing students for postsecondary success, this reputation was insufficient to attract all African American and Hispanic study participants. This research examined the factors that shape decisions to enroll or not enroll in a specific site. Conversations with African American and Hispanic minority students and parents participating in this study revealed that the factors they believed to be important in their decisions regarding the choice to participate in the IB program align with the factors identified by previous researchers. For these families, the themes of workload and stress, social relationships, family influence, and access to information did not occur in isolation. Instead, these factors worked in concert to develop the opinions of participants regarding the program. In the following material, I will discuss the implications of my findings and how they contribute to the broader understanding of how minority students make enrollment decisions regarding the IB program.

Previous research studies suggest that the social and cultural context of minority students is influential in their decision-making and sense of belonging (Kyburg et al., 2007; O'Connor et al., 2011; Park et al., 2014). The findings of this study further extend this body of knowledge. The African American and Hispanic students in this study demonstrate that their social and cultural context was built and is sustained by the community of people surrounding them. These communities and the people in them were essential to helping the students form their opinions about themselves and IB. Within these contexts, minority students identified people and activities that match or complement their personalities and preferences. It is in their communities that they find commonality and acceptance.

The family unit is often at the core of students' social and cultural context, as their own social and cultural identities first develop at home. Within the home, students learn how to interact with others, what they value, and how they fit within the world. However, when students transition to the school environment, they look for people and experiences to validate themselves and their values (Uwah et al., 2008). Even so, how these values are employed is not monolithic. Each family unit or specific social group has found different ways to activate these values to achieve their desired outcomes. This context is why students from both groups can attribute importance to the same themes and ideas in their decision-making but come to different conclusions. For the students in Groups 1 and 2, their specific social and cultural surroundings needed to be affirmed and supported through their program choice. This outcome is evidenced by students' reliance in Groups 1 and 2 on family and peers as they considered program enrollment.

With this understanding, it is evident that the students' social and cultural influences permeate their views regarding all of the themes identified in the findings and, consequently, their decisions regarding the IB program. When we consider the topic of workload, the findings demonstrate that student and parent beliefs from both groups regarding workload were informed mainly by peers, family members, and the formal and informal sources of information accessible to them. In many cases, the same sources of information and the messages these information sources carried were available to both groups, yet students and parents in these groups had more confidence in the information better aligned to what they believed. For example, students in Group 1, when presented with information that the workload in IB was heavy, relied on information sources that confirmed that they could overcome the program's challenge for long-term benefit as this was the general belief of their family and other social and cultural influences.

On the contrary, students in Group 2, when presented with this same information, trusted in the messages that said that the workload was not worth the sacrifice to their time and social well-being, factors that were highly valued in their family and cultural context.

Similarly, the importance of social relationships with peers is an extension of the familial, social, and cultural relationships formed outside of the school setting. These students' cultural contexts support a communal experience over individualism; students need and want the group's support and encouragement (Uwah et al., 2008). This need explains the importance of the cohort model for Group 1 students. If students feel that they already have a robust social network and support system that encourages them to achieve and do their best, they are more likely to do so. In the case of Group 1, the support system increased their likelihood of program enrollment. Students in Group 2 also needed this support and encouragement but did not see the IB program as providing the required social context. They believed that their goals and achievements were better supported outside of the program.

There is a pattern of interdependence at play between the factors attributed to student decision-making in this study. The social relationships and information available to them inform student and parent decisions. These sources are received and interpreted according to the student and their family's social and cultural context. This exchange occurs in each theme presented and discussed in this dissertation. Park et al. (2014) asserted that the student's social and cultural context significantly impacts student success in an accelerated program such as the IB program. I assert that the social and cultural context of the minority student is the most influential determinant in their decision to participate in a program such as IB and must be considered to understand how minority students navigate the decision-making process.

As evidenced by my findings, race alone does not determine an attraction or aversion to the IB program. All students agreed on the importance of the themes identified through this research study. Nevertheless, these shared beliefs were viewed differently through the lens of student and family context. When examining student choice, the various dynamics that influence families' social and cultural context must be at the forefront. Varying backgrounds, experiences, and needs lead students and parents to conduct a cost-benefit analysis when deciding the program's value concerning their long-term goals. Educators and administrators must be aware of the wide variations in the perceived costs and benefits to understand better how the program intersects with these needs and how minority students make these decisions.

Based on the findings and implications discussed in this text's preceding sections, I will share my recommendations for schools, school districts, and the larger educational landscape. These recommendations address the dimension of access described in the previous discussion in a manner that encourages increased minority participation in the IB program.

Recommendations

The following recommendations from this research study's findings can support an increase in minority student enrollment in the IBDP. The recommendations are feasible and actionable for the intended parties.

Access to Information

The findings of this research demonstrate that there is a fundamental difference between information availability and access to information. While the same formal information network is available to all students, how they interpret this information can vary greatly. For example, students in group 2 came from backgrounds that allowed them to view IB as one of many pathways for college, while some students in group 1 viewed the program as a rare opportunity

to achieve their post-secondary goals. This variation in understanding can lead to fundamental differences in how they access or use this available information to make decisions.

With this knowledge it is essential for school districts and schools to make a concerted effort to meet families where they are and provide more extensive services to not only help students and parents get the information, but to process the information in a way that makes sense in their personal context. One way to do this is to develop a matching system. School district and school personnel can be available to help parents match their high school and secondary goals with the appropriate program. Such a service can more directly address concerns about program fit and also provide new information to families that is relevant to their personal circumstances.

Schools and school districts can also use program descriptions that relate to personality characteristics to help families determine fit. For example, instead of only describing the IB program as one that is academically rigorous, they can also describe it as a program for students who like serving others, emphasizing the CAS component of the program. This reframing of information and effort to have parents receive a more personalized understanding of the program can significantly impact access.

Holistic Representation

School districts have the unique challenge of providing services to many families from a wide variety of social and cultural contexts. Even so, these families must understand how the IB program addresses their values and goals. Currently, many minority students and families take action based on what they believe the program to be. It is incumbent upon school districts to attend to these diverse learners' needs deliberately. In order to achieve this, schools and school districts must present a holistic view of the program. A holistic representation of the program

would provide information about all program components and goals. This view must include more than the IB program's academic requirements to be eligible and complete the program and include the program's aims and beliefs' full breadth and depth. This change would mean placing additional emphasis on the IB program's focus on the students' holistic development. The program currently addresses holistic development through mandates such as the IB Learner Profile, which addresses character development, Approaches to Learning, which focuses on teaching students how to take ownership of their knowledge and learning. The Creative, Active, Service (CAS) program provides the opportunity and encouragement for students to be involved in activities outside of the classroom. Such information could help ease minority parent concerns related to the social limitations they believe imposed by the program.

Program Education

Just as the program's perceptions and beliefs have been established over time, any campaign to change these thoughts must be implemented through an extensive educational campaign. Because how the program achieves its goals is complex, students and parents need exposure and access to this information earlier in their educational journey as it takes some time to process and understand. One suggestion is to implement formal education through middle school counselors beginning in the sixth grade, explaining educational options to parents and students. These educators are often some of the first educational professionals with whom students will have conversations about the program. The information provided by these professionals leaves an impression on students and helps form their opinions. However, these educators must have appropriate professional development that includes consideration for diverse social and cultural contexts to provide accurate, objective information. As the

information received more closely addresses the consideration of minority students, they are more likely to see the IB program as a possible fit.

Participation Criteria

School districts should also review their criteria for program entrance. As previously discussed, the International Baccalaureate Organization imposes no criteria for entry. Entry criteria is a construct of local municipalities. However, such criteria can impact how students and families view the program, making room for the belief that it is for a particular student type and is incompatible with their unique social and cultural contexts and beliefs. Schools and districts may combat these beliefs by sharing that the program does not require arbitrary criteria but should instead emphasize program curricula and the skills necessary to succeed in the program. Such descriptions provide a more holistic view of what characteristics support success and are not based on grades and test scores' subjective nature. Understanding the student's social and cultural context and how current criteria may impact participants' diversity is necessary to increase minority participation.

Workload Audit

Individual schools can also take steps to increase minority student participation in their IB programs. The most prolific factor presented by participants of this study was the idea of workload and stress. The perceptions of the workload are rooted in myth from rumors about the program and actual student experiences. As with entrance criteria, the IB Organization does not prescribe a certain amount of work. Instead, the IB Organization provides schools with an outline of covered topics and assessed skills. Schools have great flexibility in how they achieve these goals. Even so, educators often mistake acceleration for more work, which can make the program unappealing, as shared in the findings. In conjunction with their teachers, school

administrations should conduct an audit or review of students' required work to eliminate unnecessary tasks, focusing on the quality of work. Also, IB faculty should collaborate to help manage and monitor student workloads, considering factors outside of school to ensure students are not overwhelmed by teacher requirements.

While the findings suggest that parents need more straightforward communication from schools and school districts, the International Baccalaureate Organization can assist partner schools and districts by developing parent communication tools that clearly articulate the program's skills and long-term benefits through consistent messaging. These materials would be consistent with the IB's increased focus on diversity and access for all students. While the IB has developed some information in this manner, it is not concise and not readily accessible to lay community members.

Recommendation for Future Studies

Future studies related to this problem may further contribute to the body of knowledge by exploring further the idea of workload. The idea of workload was a consideration of students and parents in both participant groups. For Group 2, it appeared to be the primary deterrent to participation. It would help quantify what students perceive as a significant workload and investigate the types of work and assignments considered valuable amongst students. This information can guide understanding of how minority students process and engage with educational expectations in the classroom.

Conclusion

The education of minority students in the U.S. is characterized by underrepresentation and ill-preparedness for the rigors of college and university compared to their Caucasian peers (Backes et al., 2014). This preparedness is essential to all students' postsecondary educational

opportunities and outcomes (Flowers, 2008), especially for minorities whose life outcomes are disproportionately impacted by lack of postsecondary success. This study sought to understand one way in which this underrepresentation manifests through IBDP enrollment decisions.

In Chapter 2, I discussed how minority students' access is nuanced and that it is more than the availability of programs (Colgren & Sappington, 2015). The findings support that notion. Access is a function of the social and cultural context of each student and their families. This study demonstrated that although the factors that mattered to each student group in this study, including workload and stress, family influence, social relationships, and access to information, were similar, it is within the context of their social and cultural contexts that they derived meaning and used to make decisions.

These applications resulted in different outcomes, with some students applying to participate in the IBDP and others choosing not to apply. This study's implications and recommendations illuminate the impact of these various factors and serve as starting points for addressing student access concerns. Colgren and Sappington (2015) suggested that we must change the way we, as educators, do things. We must change how we address student social and cultural concerns when educating students and parents about their options.

This study is vital to minority student enrollment issues in the IBDP because it yields student and parent voices to identify factors that encourage and discourage minority student enrollment. The implications and recommendations honor student voices and experiences and do not require them to change. Instead, these recommendations call for small actionable changes by the local educational system. If made, these changes can offer more robust and accurate ways to appeal to minority student populations when receiving the option to join an IB program.

Dissemination Plan

I serve as an Assistant Principal in the high school in which this study was conducted. I am directly responsible for the administration of the IB program in this context. This research's findings have been invaluable in increasing my awareness of the crucial factors for African American and Hispanic students in my local context. This increased awareness enables me to improve my service and support of students and their families as they make educational decisions. To do so, I must understand their social and cultural context and what they value. It will also be necessary for me to be prepared to provide resources and education so that students and families can access the breadth and depth of the offerings available to them. I believe that the education I have received from this research positions me to help families receive an education that honors and is compatible with their goals and values.

My research dissemination will include executive summaries and presentations structured on Chapter 4 material and include the problem of practice, study purpose, context, methodological approach, findings, implications, and recommendations. Consideration will be given to each stakeholder group and their needs as it relates to the IB program.

Primary Stakeholders

The primary stakeholders of my research and its findings include the school administration and faculty as well as students and families enrolled at the study site. For students and families, the findings of this research can contribute to program improvements.

Families

The findings reflect four major themes that factor into student and parent decision-making as it relates to participating in the IB program or not. It is vital to allow the opportunity

for study participants to reflect on their decision-making and understand how their views are similar and different to other families involved in the study.

For these families, I plan to schedule a meeting via Microsoft Teams for all study participants, where I will include a PowerPoint presentation that contains the findings, implications, and recommendations of this study. This presentation will be informal, and students and parents will be encouraged to have a conversation with me and other participants about the information presented. It will also serve as a preview of what is to be shared with the community. It will be essential to get their feedback as a demonstration of a continued commitment to honoring their thoughts and opinions. Most importantly, this presentation will highlight for families the importance of access to quality information in decision-making. This information has the potential to inform decision-making as it relates to college admissions, career selection, or other important decisions.

The information learned through this research will be essential to benefiting future families who may consider the IB program. The findings of this research emphasize the importance of the social and cultural context of students and their families. Therefore, providing a variety of outreach platforms to inform families of the merits of IB is key. In my local context, we will look to increase our social media presence to highlight the diversity of students and activities in the program. This will include descriptions of IB and how it interacts with sports and extracurricular activities and how students find balance. I will look to the development of a shadowing or buddy system that will allow prospective students to shadow or partner with a current student who has similar interests or comes from a similar background. This ability to see and experience the program first hand and learn from a peer can be an invaluable tool in helping a student see how the program may fit into their goals.

Finally, it will be important to provide support to parents so that they feel comfortable in their understanding of the program. To achieve this, a parent ambassador program will be developed to connect prospective parents with parents of current IB students so that they can ask questions and receive information in an informal but supportive manner. The parent ambassadors can offer information about their experiences but also recommendations and tips about navigating the program and supporting students who choose to do IB.

School Administration and Teaching Staff

The next set of meetings will be with the school administration and teaching staff at the study site. This study provided context-specific information that impacts the work of administration and faculty as well as the learning environment for students. This study's findings may assist the administration and faculty in attracting and retaining minority students in the IB program and improving program outcomes for minority students at this site. These meetings will focus on every research finding as each finding is relevant to the school staff's ability to recruit and retain students

The meeting with the school administration will occur first. I will provide a written brief before the meeting, answer questions, and discuss how the findings and recommendations may inform their practice. The presentation of this information, including any modifications discussed in the administrative meeting, will be given to faculty and staff during a faculty meeting with discussion and reflection opportunities. I will make the following recommendations to school leaders and faculty.

1. Conduct an audit of the program workload to ensure that unnecessary work is significantly reduced or eliminated, potentially attracting more students. This audit may be conducted over time and can be facilitated by developing a program

calendar that includes major student assignments. School administration and teachers can use the calendar as a tool to monitor students' workload on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis.

2. Revise the school's formal presentations about the program. Current presentations emphasize the academic program requirements. It will be important that the school adjust presentations to be more holistic, emphasizing skills and personal development as emphasized in the IB Learner Profile, CAS, and the Approaches to Learning as well as informing potential students of the academic components.

These presentations will occur in May of 2021 and I will use the feedback to revise the executive summary and presentations for other stakeholder groups.

Secondary Stakeholders

This study's secondary stakeholders are district-level administration, including the offices of School Choice, Accelerated Programs, High Schools, and district cabinet and school board members. These stakeholders are responsible for overseeing the overall recruitment and retention of students. The study findings can help them gain a deeper understanding of IB program access and student and family decision-making to help them develop policies and practices designed to increase access.

To achieve this, district-level administration will receive an executive summary that includes recommendations for considering program participation criteria and how the district informs students and families about the program. The following recommendations will be made to district personnel:

1. Review, and where possible, revise access criteria for the program. Current criteria create perceptions that the IB program is only suitable for a select group of students. The findings showed that some students believed that the IB program was for students who were singularly focused on the academic portion of school participation. The academic requirements could exclude students who may not test well or get the best grades but who may be interested in IB's learning opportunities. These perceptions can turn people away from the program.
2. Revise the district's formal presentations about the IB program to include a more holistic focus on all program components by including the academic requirements as well as non-academic characteristics such as the IB Learner Profile, CAS, and Approaches to Learning.
3. The district should provide opportunities for middle school personnel to receive education about the IB program, so they can better assist families in their decision-making.

To communicate these recommendations beyond the executive summary context, I will request an opportunity to present at a school board meeting or other appropriate meetings, including the Office of Accelerated Programs' monthly coordinator meetings. I will request that these presentations occur in the summer of 2021, before the next IB program recruitment season.

Tertiary Stakeholders

Tertiary stakeholders include the International Baccalaureate Organization, the Florida League of IB Schools, and other IB educators nationally and globally, including those with specific interests in improving minority students' educational opportunities. For those who work directly with the IB, my study will provide information about how these groups of students

perceived the IB program. This information can be used to conduct additional research in different contexts to determine if this study's findings are consistent with those in other educational settings across the country. Because the Florida League of IB Schools advocates for and represents all IB programs throughout the state, this study's findings can be shared with its membership to advance IB program goals throughout the state of Florida. I will highlight the findings and the factors presented as relevant to minority student decision-making in the context of this study. The literature review demonstrated that a lack of access to programs such as IB contributes to the achievement gap of minority students. For others who are involved or interested in IB, this study can contribute to research on the achievement gap and provide recommendations for addressing barriers to equitable outcomes.

A presentation to the Florida League of IB Schools' Executive Board and membership is scheduled for March 2021 (board) and December (membership) of 2021. This presentation will include the findings and implications for the organization to consider in diversifying the program and improving minority student access.

A presentation to all school counselors in the neighboring school district has been scheduled for April of 2021. This presentation will present an overview of the research, including findings, recommendations, and implications to help this district identify ways to increase minority student enrollment in acceleration programs.

Finally, I will submit a proposal to present at the 2021 International Baccalaureate Conference of the Americas to share my findings and provide recommendations to other IB practitioners in the Americas region. These recommendations will focus on the importance of understanding the social and cultural contexts of students and their variations within racial groups. I will also submit a research brief to the International Baccalaureate Research division

for inclusion in their comprehensive database of research conducted about the IB. This submission will serve to broaden information available to researchers and practitioners regarding the IB Diploma Program.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Focus Group 1- Students who applied and have commenced program participation

1. Tell me about your academic experience prior to coming to high school?
2. What parts of school did you enjoy most before coming to high school? Why?
3. What parts of school did you enjoy least before coming to high school? Why?
4. Tell me about the day you found out you were invited to participate in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program. What were your thoughts? What feelings did you experience? What did you say?
5. What did you know about the International Baccalaureate Program prior to receiving an invitation?
6. What were your thoughts and beliefs about the International Baccalaureate Program?
7. What things excited or concerned you about the International Baccalaureate Program? Why?
8. What things did you consider when deciding to participate in the International Baccalaureate Program? Why were these things important?
9. What type of guidance or advice did you receive when making your decision? Who gave this advice?
10. Describe your first day in the program.
11. What has been your overall experience at the school? In the program?

Focus Group 2- Students who qualified to apply but did not apply

1. Tell me about your academic experience prior to coming to high school?
2. What parts of school did you enjoy most before coming to high school? Why?
3. What parts of school did you enjoy least before coming to high school? Why?

4. Tell me about the day you found out you were invited to participate in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program. What were your thoughts? What feelings did you experience? What did you say?
5. What did you know about the International Baccalaureate Program prior to receiving an invitation?
6. What were your thoughts and beliefs about the International Baccalaureate Program?
7. What things excited or concerned you about the International Baccalaureate Program? Why?
8. Why did you choose not to apply for the program?
9. What things did you consider when deciding not to apply? Why were these things important?
10. What type of guidance or advice did you receive when making your decision? Who gave this advice?
11. What has been your overall experience at the school?
12. Have your thoughts or feelings changed about program participation?

Parent Interviews- Group 1 (Students applied and commenced program participation)

1. When considering the education of your student, what things do you value?
2. Tell me about the day you found out that your student was eligible to participate in the International Baccalaureate Program. What was your reaction? The reaction of your student? What did you say?
3. What did you know about the program prior to receiving the invitation to apply?
4. What were your thoughts and beliefs about the International Baccalaureate Program?
5. What things excited or concerned you about the International Baccalaureate Program?
6. When making your decisions, what resources did you utilize?
7. What conversations occurred between you and your student about program participation?

8. Describe how you and your family arrived at the decision to apply and participate in the program.

Parent Interviews Group 2 (Students who qualified to apply, but did not apply)

1. When considering the education of your student, what things do you value?
2. Tell me about the day you found out that your student was eligible to participate in the International Baccalaureate Program. What was your reaction? The reaction of your student? What did you say?
3. What did you know about the program prior to receiving the invitation to apply?
4. What were your thoughts and beliefs about the International Baccalaureate Program?
5. What things excited or concerned you about the International Baccalaureate Program?
6. When making your decisions, what resources did you utilize?
7. What conversations occurred between you and your student about program participation?
8. Describe how you and your family arrived at the decision to not apply for the program.

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT AND STUDENT ASSENT

Assent/Parental Permission to Take Part in Research

Title of Research Study: Is IB for Me? Minority Student Enrollment Decisions in an International Baccalaureate Program

Principal Investigator: LaShanda Allen, Doctoral Candidate, FSU

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Ayesha Khurshid, Associate Professor, ELPS, FSU

You/Your child is being invited to take part in a research study. Please find below information about this research for you to think about before you decide to take part. Ask us if you have any questions about this information or the research before you decide to take part.

What is this study about?

Researchers at Florida State University are studying minority student decision making for participation in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program. Researchers are interested in finding out how and why minority students make the decision to participate or not participate in the program. You/Your child is invited to take part in the study because you are a minority student who qualified to participate in the IB program. You are one of 33 persons to take part in this study. Your involvement in the study is expected to last 1 to 2 hours.

What should I know about a research study?

If you agree to be in this research, your (your child's) participation will include a 1 to 2-hour focus group interview where your child will answer questions about your child's decision making process. These interviews will be audio recorded for reference of the researcher.

We will share with you a summary of the research findings at the conclusion of the study. These findings will be provided during a scheduled presentation.

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to do so. It is up to you if you want to take part. You can choose not to take part now and change your mind later if you want. Your decision will not be held against you. You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

How long will the research last?

I expect that you/your child will be in this research study for approximately 1 to 2 hours. These interviews will be group interviews and may occur during class time, before school, after school, or virtually depending on student schedules.

What happens if I say “Yes, I want to be in this research”?

If you agree to be in this study, you/your student will be asked to participate in a focus group interview with 6-7 other students talking about the International Baccalaureate Program. During this time, you will be asked questions about the program.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?

The risks of harms or discomforts associated with the research are minimal. Taking part in this research study is your decision. Your (your child’s) participation in this study is voluntary. You/Your child does not have to take part in this study, but if you/they do, you/they can stop at any time. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your relationship with the researcher, your school, or FSU. There are no consequences to which you are otherwise entitled, if your child does not participate.

You/Your child has the right to choose not to participate in any study activity or completely withdraw from continued participation at any point in this study without consequences to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you/your child withdraws from the study, the data collected to the point of withdrawal will be deleted.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

The results of the study may be published or presented, but no information that may identify your child will ever be provided or released in publications or presentations. We will take steps to protect your privacy and confidentiality. These steps include not including your name or other identifiable in the written study, storing all data in secure online storage and limiting access to data to only the principal investigator and supervising professor. All data will be stored for up to one year and deleted after that time. Despite taking steps to protect your privacy or the confidentiality of your identifiable information, we cannot guarantee that your privacy or confidentiality will be protected. For example, if your child tells us something that makes us

believe that you or others have been or may be physically harmed, we may need to report that information to the appropriate agencies.

Individuals and organizations responsible for conducting or monitoring this research may be permitted access to and inspect the research records. This includes the Florida State University Institutional Review Board (FSU IRB), which reviewed this study and the study supervisor.

The information collected as part of this research will not be used or distributed for future research studies, even if all of your identifiers are removed.

What else do I need to know?

There may be no personal benefit from your/your child's participation but the knowledge received may be of value to society.

You/your child will not receive any compensation for your child's participation in this study.

Who can I talk to?

If you have questions, concerns, or have experienced a research-related injury, contact the research team at:

LaShanda Allen, Doctoral Candidate, FSU

The Florida State University Institutional Review Board ("IRB") is overseeing this research. The FSU IRB is a group of people who perform official independent review of research studies before studies begin to ensure that the rights and welfare of participants are protected. If you have questions about your rights or wish to speak with someone other than the research team, you may contact:

Florida State University IRB

2010 Levy Drive, Suite 276

Tallahassee, Florida 32306

850-644-7900

humansubjects@fsu.edu

STATEMENT OF ASSENT

I have read and thought about the information about the study that is described in this form. I understand why the research is being done and what I will be asked to do. I also understand that I may ask questions at any time, and that I can stop taking part in the study at any time. By signing below, I show that I am willing to take part in this study.

Printed Name of Research Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

I agree to be audiotaped

YES (initial) _____ NO (initial) _____

I agree to be videotaped

YES (initial) _____ NO (initial) _____

I agree to allow use of audio/video in presentations or publications

YES (initial) _____ NO (initial) _____

I agree to use of audio/video for educational purposes including _____

YES (initial) _____ NO (initial) _____

STATEMENT OF PARENTAL PERMISSION

I have read and considered the information presented in this form. I confirm that I understand the purpose of the research and the study procedures. I understand that I may ask questions at any time and can withdraw my child's participation without prejudice. I have read this consent form.

My signature below indicates that you have my permission to include my child as a participant in this study.

Printed Name of Parent or Legal Guardian

Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian

Date

I give permission for my child to be audiotaped

YES (initial) ____ NO (initial) ____

I give permission for my child to be videotaped

YES (initial) ____ NO (initial) ____

I give permission to allow the use of audio/video involving my child in presentations or publications

YES (initial) ____ NO (initial) ____

I give permission to allow the use of audio/video involving my child for educational purposes including ____

YES (initial) ____ NO (initial) ____

Include any of the additional permission statements, such as permissions to be audio- or videotaped, otherwise delete. As applicable, add additional signature block for other parent if required by the IRB

Researcher's Signature

I have fully explained the research study described by this form. I have answered the participant and/or parent/guardians' questions and will answer any future questions to the best of my ability. I will tell the family and/or the person taking part in this research of any changes in the procedures or in the possible harms/possible benefits of the study that may affect their health or their willingness to stay in the study.

Printed Name of Research Team Member Obtaining Assent/Parental Permission

Signature of Research Team Member

Date

Permission to Take Part in a Human Research Study

Title of the Study: Is IB for Me? Minority Student Enrollment Decisions in an International Baccalaureate Program

Principal Investigator: LaShanda Allen, Doctoral Candidate, FSU

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Ayesha Khurshid, Associate Professor, ELPS, FSU

Your child is being invited to take part in a research study. Please find below information about this research for you to think about before you decide to take part. Ask us if you have any questions about this information or the research before you decide to take part.

What is this study about?

Researchers at Florida State University are studying minority student decision making for participation in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program. Researchers are interested in finding out how and why minority students make the decision to participate or not participate in the program. Your child is invited to take part in the study because you are a minority student who qualified to participate in the IB program. You are one of 33 persons to take part in this study. Your involvement in the study is expected to last 1 to 2 hours.

What will happen during this research?

If you agree to be in this research, your child's participation will include a 1 to 2-hour focus group interview where your child will answer questions about your child's decision making process. These interviews will be audio recorded for reference of the researcher.

We will share with you a summary of the research findings at the conclusion of the study. These findings will be provided during a scheduled presentation.

What will you do to protect my privacy?

The results of the study may be published or presented, but no information that may identify your child will ever be provided or released in publications or presentations. We will take steps to protect your privacy and confidentiality. These steps include not including your name or other identifiable in the written study, storing all data in secure online storage and limiting access to data to only the principal investigator and supervising professor. All data will be stored for up to one year and deleted after that time. Despite taking steps to protect your privacy or the confidentiality of your identifiable information, we cannot guarantee that your privacy or confidentiality will be protected. For example, if your child tells us something that makes us believe that you or others have been or may be physically harmed, we may need to report that information to the appropriate agencies.

Individuals and organizations responsible for conducting or monitoring this research may be permitted access to and inspect the research records. This includes the Florida State University Institutional Review Board (FSU IRB), which reviewed this study and the study supervisor.

The information collected as part of this research will not be used or distributed for future

research studies, even if all of your identifiers are removed.

What are the risks of harms or discomforts associated with this research?

The risks of harms or discomforts associated with the research are minimal.

How might I benefit from this research?

There may be no personal benefit from your child's participation but the knowledge received may be of value to society.

What is the compensation for the research?

You will not receive any compensation for your child's participation in this study.

What will happen if I choose not to participate?

It is your choice to participate or not to participate in this research. Participation is voluntary.

Is my participation voluntary, and can I withdraw?

Taking part in this research study is your decision. Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. Your child does not have to take part in this study, but if they do, they can stop at any time. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your relationship with the researcher, your school, or FSU. There are no consequences to which you are otherwise entitled, if your child does not participate.

Your child has the right to choose not to participate in any study activity or completely withdraw from continued participation at any point in this study without consequences to which you are otherwise entitled.

If your child withdraws from the study, the data collected to the point of withdrawal will be deleted.

Who do I talk to if I have questions?

If you have questions, concerns, or have experienced a research-related injury, contact the research team at:

LaShanda Allen, Doctoral Candidate, FSU

The Florida State University Institutional Review Board ("IRB") is overseeing this research. The FSU IRB is a group of people who perform official independent review of research studies before studies begin to ensure that the rights and welfare of participants are protected. If you

have questions about your rights or wish to speak with someone other than the research team, you may contact:

Florida State University IRB
2010 Levy Drive, Suite 276
Tallahassee, Florida 32306
850-644-7900
humansubjects@fsu.edu

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read and considered the information presented in this form. I confirm that I understand the purpose of the research and the study procedures. I understand that I may ask questions at any time and can withdraw my participation without prejudice. I have read this consent form. My signature below indicates my willingness to participate in this study.

I consent to participate in this study.

Printed Name of Adult Participant

Signature of Adult Participant

Date

I agree to be audiotaped

YES (initial) ____ NO (initial) ____

I agree to allow use of audio/video in presentations or publications

YES (initial) ____ NO (initial) ____

Researcher's Signature

I have fully explained the research study described by this form. I have answered the participant and/or parent/guardians' questions and will answer any future questions to the best of my ability. I will tell the family and/or the person taking part in this research of any changes in the procedures or in the possible harms/possible benefits of the study that may affect their health or their willingness to stay in the study.

Printed Name of Research Team Member Obtaining Consent

Signature of Research Team Member

Date

APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
OFFICE *of the* VICE PRESIDENT *for* RESEARCH



APPROVAL

July 27, 2020

LaShanda Allen

Dear LaShanda Allen:

On 7/27/2020, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Expedited (6) Voice, video, digital, or image recordings; (7)(a) Behavioral research; (7)(b) Social science methods
Title:	Is IB for Me? Minority Student Enrollment Decisions in an International Baccalaureate Program
Investigator:	LaShanda Allen
Submission ID:	STUDY00001396
Study ID:	STUDY00001396
Funding:	None
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None

Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview Protocol Focus Group 1.pdf, Category: Survey/Questionnaire; • Interview Protocol Focus Group 2.pdf, Category: Survey/Questionnaire; • Interview Protocol Focus Group 3.pdf, Category: Survey/Questionnaire; • Interview Protocol Parent Group 1.pdf, Category: Survey/Questionnaire; • Interview Protocol Parent Group 2.pdf, Category: Survey/Questionnaire; • Interview Protocol Parent Group 3.pdf, Category: Survey/Questionnaire; • Allen_L IRB Protocol Revised submission.pdf, Category: IRB Protocol; • Consent.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Email Script.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • HRP-502c Assent Parental Permission Template SBER 14-17yo.pdf, Category: Consent Form;
---------------------	---

The IRB approved the protocol, effective from 6/17/2020, including the modification to conform your study with the permitted exceptions to the FSU temporary COVID-19- related cessation of research activities that involve in-person interventions or interactions with human research participants. Upon receipt provide FSU IRB a copy of the final approval letter from the school district.

You are advised that any modification(s) to the protocol for this project must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation of the proposed modification(s).

Federal regulations require that the Principal Investigator promptly report any new information related to this protocol (see Investigator Manual (HRP-103)).

In conducting this protocol, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system.

Sincerely,

Human Subjects Research Office
humansubjects@fsu.edu

REFERENCES

- Backes, B., Holzer, H. J., & Velez, E. D., (2014). Is it worth it? Postsecondary education and labor market outcomes for the disadvantaged. *National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research*. 1-44.
- Barnard-Brak, L., McGaha-Garnett, V., & Burley, H. (2011). Advanced placement course enrollment and school-level characteristics. *NASSP Bulletin*, 95(3), 165-174. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636511418640>
- Burris, C. C., & Garrity, D. T. (2008). *Detracking for excellence and equity*. ASCD.
- Burris, C. C., Welner, K. G., & Bezoza, J. W. (2009). Universal access to quality education: Research and recommendations for the elimination of curricular stratification. *Poverty & Race*, 19(1), 3-5. <https://www.prrac.org/newsletters/janfeb2010.pdf>
- Burris, C. C., Wiley, E., Welner, K. G., & Murphy, J. (2008). Accountability, rigor, and detracking: Achievement effects of embracing a challenging curriculum as a universal good for all students. *Teachers College Record*, 110(3), 571–607. <https://www.tcrecord.org/>
- Colgren, C., & Sappington, N. E. (2015). Closing the achievement gap means transformation. *Education Leadership Review of Doctoral Research*, 2(1), 24-33.
- College Board. (2014). *The 10th annual AP report to the nation, Appendix D*. College Board. <https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/digitalServices/pdf/ap/rtn/10th-annual/10th-annual-ap-report-appendix-d.pdf>
- College Board. (2021). *Read our bylaws*. College Board. <https://about.collegeboard.org/governance/bylaws>
- Conger, D., Long, M. C., & Iatarola, P. (2009). Explaining race, poverty, and gender disparities in advanced course-taking. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 28(4), 555-576. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.20455>
- Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. (2018). *Online EdD program guide: An integrated model of coursework, advising, and research in the ELPS online Ed.D program*. College of Education, Florida State University.
- Flowers, L. A., (2008). Racial differences in the impact of participating in advanced placement programs on educational and labor market outcomes. *Educational Foundations*, Winter-Spring, 121-132.
- Foust, R. C., Hertberg-Davis, H., & Callahan, C. M. (2009). Students' perceptions of the non-academic advantages and disadvantages of participation in advanced placement courses and international baccalaureate programs. *Adolescence*, 44(174), 289–312.

- Halic, O. (2013). *Postsecondary educational attainment of IB diploma programme candidates from US high schools*. <https://ibo.org/globalassets/publications/ib-research/dp/nscpostsecondaryfullreportfinal.pdf>
- Harris-Murri, N., King, K., & Rostenberg, D. (2006). Reducing disproportionate minority representation in special education programs for students with emotional disturbances: Toward a culturally responsive response to intervention model. *Education & Treatment of Children (ETC)*, 29(4), 779–799.
- Hoy, W., & Miskel, C. (2012). *Educational administration* (9th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.
- International Baccalaureate. (2010). *Increasing access for diverse schools and students*. <https://www.ibo.org/globalassets/publications/recognition/increasingaccessfordiverseschoolsandstudents.pdf>
- International Baccalaureate. (2018). *Global research findings on the diploma programme*. <https://ibo.org/globalassets/publications/ib-research/dp-infographic-2018-en.pdf>
- International Baccalaureate. (2021). Diploma programme. International Baccalaureate. <https://www.ibo.org/programmes/diploma-programme>
- Jaffe-Walter, R., & Lee, S. (2011). “To trust in my root and to take that forward”: Supporting college access for immigrant youth in the global city. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 42(3), 281-296.
- Johnson, B. & Christensen, L. (2012). *Educational research, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed approach*. (4th ed.). Sage.
- Kettler, T., & Hurst, L. T. (2017). Advanced academic participation: A longitudinal analysis of ethnicity gaps in suburban schools. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 40(1), 3-19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0162353216686217>
- Klopfenstein, K. (2004). Advanced placement: Do minorities have equal opportunity? *Economics of Education Review*, 23(2), 115-131. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-7757\(03\)00076-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-7757(03)00076-1)
- Kohli, R., Pizarro, M., & Nevarez, A. (2017). The “new racism” of K-12 schools: Centering critical research on racism. *Review of Research in Education*, 41(1), 182–202. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X17694329>
- Kyburg, R. M., Hertberg-Davis, H., & Callahan, C. M. (2007). Advanced placement and international baccalaureate programs: Optimal learning environments for talented minorities? *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 18(2), 172-215. <https://doi.org/10.4219/jaa-2007-357> <https://doi.org/10.4219/jaa-2007-357>
- Mameli, C., Molinari, L., & Passini, S. (2019). Agency and responsibility in adolescent students: A challenge for the societies of tomorrow. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89(1), 41. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12215>

- Martinez, M., & Klopott, S. (2005). The link between high school reform and college access and success for low-income and minority youth. *American Youth Policy Forum and Pathways to College Network*. <http://p20.utsa.edu/images/uploads/Articles%202.pdf>
- Moore, G. W., & Slate, J. R. (2008). Who's taking the advanced placement courses and how are they doing: A statewide two-year Study. *High School Journal*, 92(1), 56–67. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hsj.0.0013>
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2016). *The high school longitudinal study of 2009 (HSL:09): Second follow up*. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018139.pdf>
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2017). *Indicator 6: Elementary and Secondary Enrollment*. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/raceindicators/indicator_rbb.asp
- Ndura, E., Robinson, M., & Ochs, G. (2003). Minority students in high school advanced placement courses: Opportunity and equity denied. *American Secondary Education* 32(1), 1-38. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41064502>
- O'Connor, C., Mueller, J., Lewis, R. L., Rivas-Drake, D., & Rosenberg, S. (2011). “Being” black and strategizing for excellence in a racially stratified academic hierarchy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 48(6), 1232–1257. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831211410303>
- Park, K., Caine, V., & Wimmer, R. (2014). The experiences of advanced placement and international baccalaureate diploma program participants: A systematic review of qualitative research. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 25(2), 129-153. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1932202X14532258>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). SAGE
- Perna, L. W., May, H., Yee, A., Ransom, T., Rodriguez, A., & Fester, R., (2015). Unequal access to rigorous high school curricula: An exploration of the opportunity to benefit from the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program (IBDP). *Educational Policy*, 29(2), 402-425. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904813492383>
- Radford, A. W., Fritch, L. B., Leu, K., & Duprey, M. (2018). *High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSL:09) second follow-up: A first look at fall 2009 ninth-graders in 2016 (NCES 2018-139)*. National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018139.pdf>
- Rector-Aranda A. (2016). School norms and reforms, critical race theory, and the fairytale of equitable education. *Critical Questions in Education*, 7(1), 1-16. https://academyedstudies.files.wordpress.com/2016/01/rector-aranda-final-7_1.pdf
- Roderick, M., Nagaoka, J., & Coca, V. (2009). College readiness for all: The challenge for urban high schools. *Future of Children*, 19(1), 185-210.

- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://www.doi.org/10.4135/9781452226651>
- Saldaña, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage Publications Ltd.
- Shenton, A. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, 22, 63-75. <https://doi.org/10.3233/EFI-2004-22201>
- Strauss, V. (2015, February 12). *What's the purpose of education in the 21st century?* The Washington Post. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2015/02/12/whats-the-purpose-of-education-in-the-21st-century/>
- Suldo, S. M., Shaunessy-Dedrick, E., Ferron, J., & Dedrick, R. F. (2018). Predictors of success among high school students in advanced placement and International Baccalaureate programs. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 62(4), 350. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0016986218758443>
- Theokas, C., & Saaris, R. (2013). *Finding America's missing AP and IB students. Shattering Expectations Series*. Education Trust. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED578802.pdf>
- Uwah, C. J., McMahon, H. G., & Furlow, C. F. (2008). School belonging, educational aspirations, and academic self-efficacy among African American male high school students: Implications for school counselors. *Professional School Counseling*, 11(5), 296. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X0801100503>
- Whiting, G. W., & Ford, D. Y. (2009). Black students and advanced placement classes: Summary, concerns, and recommendations. *Gifted Child Today* 32(1), 23-26. <https://doi.org/10.4219/gct-2009-840>
- Wilson, H., Siegle, D., McCoach, D. B., Little, C.A., & Reis, S. M., (2014). A model of academic self-concept: Perceived difficulty and social comparison among academically accelerated secondary students. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 58(2), 11-126. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0016986214522858>

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

LaShanda D. Allen completed her doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Florida State University. LaShanda received both her Bachelor's and Master's degrees from the University of North Florida. She has worked in education for the past 18 years, all of which have been directly involved in facilitating high school students' education. Through this work, LaShanda has developed an interest in high school acceleration programs. This interest has spurred her involvement with IB in many capacities, including IB Coordinator, IB Administrator, a member of the Executive Board of the Florida League of IB Schools. Additionally, she serves as a member of the International Baccalaureate Educator Network, completing training as a site visitor, consultant, and workshop leader. She has also worked closely with other schools in the development of their IB and magnet programs. LaShanda currently serves as an Assistant Principal, where she continues to be responsible for the IB program as well as the school's Language Arts, Fine Arts, and World Languages Departments.