Promise and Paradox: How Context Affects Teachers’ Enactment of the Critical Conditions for Equity in College Access in Suburban Schools

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Promise and Paradox: How Context Affects Teachers’ Enactment of the Critical Conditions for Equity in College Access in Suburban Schools

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in
Teaching and Learning
by
Suzanne Michele Van Steenbergen

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2016
The Dissertation of Suzanne Michele Van Steenbergen is approved, and is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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2016
DEDICATION

I have a number of people to thank for their support through this process. First, I am so grateful to my dissertation committee—Jim Levin, Paula Levin, and Bud Mehan. Jim kept my eye on the destination and never hesitated to lend a supporting hand with the IRB process and with any and all technical challenges that emerged over time. Paula’s brilliant questions helped me develop a sense of my own voice as a writer and a researcher, just as her genuine curiosity in my research made me feel valued and heard as a student and as a person. Bud’s wisdom and “disruptive” mindset (in the best sense of that word) validated my own observations and fueled my desire for greater understanding of the political and cultural forces at work in schools. And all three educators kept their faith in me during a challenging period in my life, which is something I will never forget.

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Thank you to my parents and dear friends, many of whom I have sometimes neglected in favor of working on this dissertation. Your unconditional support and love have kept me afloat over these past few years in ways I will never be able to repay.

I am indebted to the ten teachers who participated in this study, all strangers at the outset, who gave their time and open-hearted perspectives for no other reason than to help a fellow teacher.
Finally, I would like to thank my students over the past 12 years for teaching me more than I could have ever taught you, for forgiving my mistakes, and for allowing me into your lives however briefly. I am ever transformed by your questions, your trust, and your willingness to follow me along toward a deeper understanding of the world.
The paradox of education is precisely this—that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated. The purpose of education, finally, is to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself, to make his own decisions, to say to himself this is black or this is white, to decide for himself whether there is a God in heaven or not. To ask questions of the universe, and then learn to live with those questions, is the way he achieves his own identity. But no society is really anxious to have that kind of person around. What societies really, ideally, want is a citizenry which will simply obey the rules of society. If a society succeeds in this, that society is about to perish. The obligation of anyone who thinks of himself as responsible is to examine society and try to change it and to fight it—at no matter what risk. This is the only hope society has. This is the only way societies change.

—James Baldwin, “A Talk to Teachers” (1963)
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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Promise and Paradox: How Context Affects Teachers’ Enactment of the Critical Conditions for Equity in College Access in Suburban Schools

by

Suzanne Michele Van Steenbergen

Doctor of Education, Teaching and Learning

University of California, San Diego, 2016

James Levin, Chair
Paula Levin, Co-Chair

This study investigated how secondary teachers in suburban schools enact the critical conditions for equity and diversity in college access (Oakes, Mendoza, & Silver, 2004), taking into account technical, political, and cultural dimensions of reform (Oakes, 1992). The inquiry focused on how teachers facilitate access to a culture of college-going and to institutional supports within the context of a college-preparatory program. Teachers’ everyday interactions with their students served as an entry point to probe the relationship between school context factors and teachers’ sensemaking of their own actions on behalf of students. Participants in this qualitative study included ten teachers in
four suburban Southern California high schools. Teachers sat for two semi-structured interviews each and provided a total of nearly 60 stories describing their everyday interactions with students.

Using theory of action (Argyris & Schön, 1978), sensemaking (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005) and the technical, political, and cultural domains of school reform (Oakes, 1992) as lenses to guide analysis, three key findings emerged. First, from teachers’ perspectives, the degree of perceived campus-wide support for the college-prep program stems in part from the relationship between schoolwide and reform demographics. Next, teachers responded to the degree of perceived campus-wide support for the college-prep program by reconsidering the definition of its targeted student. This process has implications for equity and diversity in college access. Finally, teachers across contexts recognized and responded to institutional constraints in strategic ways, both in marshaling support for their programs and in helping their students access critical resources.

Teachers’ stories pointed to a paradox inherent in trying to ensure equity in college access on higher-income suburban campuses: underrepresented students attending such schools might have even less access to college-going resources and institutional supports than they would attending lower-income schools. Indeed, higher income suburban schools that enroll relatively few low-income and underrepresented students may face daunting cultural constraints to ensuring equitable access to college, as requisite institutional shifts necessarily challenge long-held beliefs and practices of those with power. However, such constraints can be overcome with careful attention and strategic responses to the complex political and cultural dynamics on campus.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Persistent Opportunity Gaps in College Access

One of the most powerful motivators for educators to undertake institutional reform is to narrow persistent gaps in achievement between white, affluent students and their underrepresented and lower-income peers. While race and parental income are not determining factors in students’ academic success—students from all backgrounds and circumstances routinely achieve academically—there remain persistent system-wide gaps in student achievement as measured by standard indicators like high school graduation rates, high-stakes test scores and college matriculation (Barton & Coley, 2009). Achievement disparities along racial, ethnic and economic lines are well documented (Before the Recession, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006), and although the 2001 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act and the 2009 Race to the Top (RTT) initiative have not been widely championed by some researchers and educators, they did force districts nationwide to take a close look at data disaggregated by “subgroups,” shedding much-needed light on inequities in outcome that previously remained in the shadows (Ferguson, 2002). Further, with high-stakes testing and reporting requirements stemming from NCLB and RTT putting more pressure on districts to narrow gaps in achievement, there are many actors in the field attempting to account for and limit persistent disparities in academic achievement, even in schools with high schoolwide indicators.

But documenting the scope and persistence of so-called “achievement gaps” is not enough. In fact, attempting to account for or mitigate achievement gaps by only looking at outcomes like graduation rates and standardized test scores tends to “make the gap[s] in learning resources and opportunities in California schools invisible” (Oakes et al.,
In order to complicate our understanding of the implications of achievement gaps, (Oakes et al., 2004) draw upon extensive research to propose several “leading indicators” that point to “conditions that students in educationally disadvantaged communities require for learning and successful college preparation,” a framework that shifts the focus from “achievement” gaps to “opportunity” gaps (emphasis added). As Oakes (2003) points out, for the most part, middle and upper-middle class students from college-going families “routinely enjoy [the critical] conditions in their schools and communities” (p. 1). However, while many communities, including those with high-performing schools, “hold ideals of equity in access to schooling and advancement through merit,” as students move through school, the fact remains that the number of ethnic minority, immigrant and low-income youth in the “academic pipeline” to college becomes progressively smaller (Cooper, Chavira, & Mena, 2005).

**Shifting Demographics Alter the Reform Landscape**

Demographic changes have forced schools even with relatively few underserved students to change to meet students' needs. NCLB made it impossible for such schools to hide behind high schoolwide indicators; even high-performing schools could be flagged for failing to meet the needs of English Learners, low-income students, or students of color. Further, while California schools are among some of the most racially segregated in the country (Fanelli et al., 2010), according to a report by the Pew Hispanic Center, the demographics of suburban schools nationally are changing¹ (Fry, 2009). Unlike in the past when urban districts educated a majority of the nation’s minority students, since the 1993-1994 suburban districts have taught a majority of the nation’s

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¹ Researchers defined “suburban” in the same manner as The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), which uses Census Bureau information on population size, urbanized areas and rural/suburban definitions.
non-white students (Fry, 2009). Student enrollment in suburban districts increased by 3.4 million students between 1993 and 2006, with the Latino share of suburban district enrollment rising from 11% to 20%, and the African American share rising from 12% to 15% during the same time period. In 2006, white students made up just 59% of students in suburban districts, down from 72% in 1993 (Fry, 2009). But as Fry (2009) points out, “though there has been marked diversification of many of the nation’s suburban school districts, this does not necessarily mean that suburban students are experiencing greater racial/ethnic interaction at the level of the individual school” (p. 9). In fact, within some school districts, schools are still quite segregated. For example, two elementary districts in the county where this study takes place, ranked among the top 25 most segregated districts in California for Hispanic students during the 2006-2007 academic year (Fry, 2009, p. 15).²

These demographic trends have far-reaching implications for all schools, including higher performing suburban school districts with smaller populations of racial and ethnic minority students, some of whom are not yet achieving at similar rates as their white, middle- and upper-income peers. And in the wake of nearly a decade of budget cuts during the Great Recession that tore away at existing reforms, all schools in California, even those in higher income areas, have faced higher class sizes, reduced funding for support programs, and greater demands to mitigate the severe impact of the struggling economy on low income families (Rogers et al., 2010). In fact, in California, both high and low wealth districts have found it difficult to sustain reform efforts in a climate of economic insecurity and massive cuts to public education. The cuts in

² These two districts are not included in this study; however, they are in the same general region as the four schools in this study.
education forced districts to cut much needed services designed to narrow opportunity gaps, cuts which are having a direct impact on students’ postsecondary prospects. For example, a survey of 277 California secondary principals (22% of all high school principals in the state) found that 78% of principals reported cuts to school reform and improvement efforts and the same number reported the belief that the economic decline is contributing to higher dropout rates and lower four-year college attendance (Rogers, Bertrand, Freelon, & Fanelli, 2011). While lower poverty districts are more able to supplement losses with private donations and local property taxes, “inequality is growing across and within schools,” as fees imposed by lower poverty districts “can disadvantage students from poor families whose classmates are primarily middle class or affluent” (Rogers et al., 2011, p. 15). Even in recovery, California school districts continue to face uncertainty, as their budgets are tied directly to the broader California economy, which seems poised for recession-like activity in the near future (Janofsky, 2016; Wildermuth, 2016).

**Ensuring Equity in College Access in Suburban Schools**

While low-income and ethnic and language minority students who are enrolled in higher performing suburban schools may benefit from access to some of the critical conditions, such as safe schools and highly qualified teachers, they may not have equal access to rigorous classes or to the opportunity to develop a college-going identity. Within the same school, some students might have access to all of the leading indicators as described by (Oakes et al., 2004), while other students might not. Underrepresented students might face an uphill battle accessing the requisite resources for college-going by virtue of attending a school likely to perpetuate structured inequality—one in which
administrators and teachers do not perceive a need for schoolwide change by virtue of high test scores and a large college-going student population. In fact, disparities in access and achievement in suburban schools do persist, despite presence of the “critical conditions” prescribed by Oakes et al. (2004) (Alson, 2003; Ferguson, 2002). Such within-school variability highlights the importance of teachers in ensuring that students have access the critical conditions, as teachers are often keenly aware of the tacit “rules” governing who has access to what resources and under what circumstances.

But attentive teachers are not enough. Even the most robust “off the shelf” reform requires teachers and other professionals to challenge and disrupt institutional norms that exclude certain students from access to vital resources. The extent to which institutions use the reform process as a means toward broader cultural change has implications for the reform’s success and for students. If a school adopts a comprehensive reform model aimed at schoolwide culture change, members must be willing to broaden definitions about who is capable and deserving of college access. In this case, the broader school’s espoused goal of college access for all students comes to be largely shared by teachers and administrators, as most students in the school population benefit from the undertaking. School leaders and instructors then implement changes that more or less align with the school’s broader stated goals.

On the other hand, a school might opt to use a reform as a means to target only a smaller group of lower-achieving students, eschewing the much more complex task of broad schoolwide change in favor of a more targeted approach for certain students. This choice can be attractive for a school that already maintains high schoolwide indicators of student success, as it does not require full-scale institutional shifts in cultural norms. In
such a school, select teachers take on the task of implementing these small-scale reforms on behalf of certain students, leaving in the broader school culture in place.

Given such variability in how schools implement college access reforms, it is impossible to understand such a reform without studying it in context; it is equally impossible to understand how schools change without investigating those efforts closely across various settings. As Fusarelli (2011) argues, “one shortcoming with much of the discussion of education reform is that it speaks of reform as an entity unto itself, divorcing it from the context within which schooling occurs” (p. 227). Separating a reform from its context limits our understanding of how schools adapt to or resist change. As Mehan et al. (2010) acknowledge, “the meaning of a reform policy and how it is put into practice varies according to a person’s or organization’s perspective. That is, as a result of the institutional distribution and application of power, the meaning of the change effort or its aspects is not necessarily shared; there can be disagreement, or conflict over meaning of actions and events and even the system itself” (Mehan et al., 2010, pp. 109-110). Further, the approach a particular institution takes toward adopting a reform—whether it’s embraced schoolwide or merely allocated to address perceived “needs” of particular students—can itself create a contextual variable that has implications for those participating in the reform.

**Study Focus: Teachers’ Decisions in Context**

In either context—schools in which reform efforts target a majority of students, versus schools where reforms target a smaller group of underrepresented students—how teachers make sense of the reforms in relation to the broader school culture can affect student outcomes. Teachers arguably occupy the most influential position within an
organization with respect to students and hold enormous sway over the success of the reform through their interactions students specifically and with the institution generally. As Oakes, Rogers, Blasi, and Lipton (2006) argue, the “heart of the struggle” for ensuring equal access for all students to opportunities “will be to expose, challenge, and disrupt prevailing norms and policies of education” (p. 5). Teachers are often in the best position to engage in such disruption—they can act as “institutional agents” who empower underserved students by “provid[ing] resources and support…that significantly enables [students] to effectively navigate and exert control over” their environments, (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1078). But individual teachers can also be constrained by ideology or circumstance, and instead function more as “gatekeeping agents” who “unconsciously or consciously” perpetuate the status quo, focusing their attention on “those privileged by class or race, to those who exhibit the dominant cultural discourse” (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1077).

In more diverse schools where many students are “targets” of reform efforts, teachers might find it easier to ensure that students in their classrooms have access to school-wide efforts to ensure equity and access, as their efforts might be more in line with the institution and thus might provide more fertile ground for empowering students. But in schools where the reform effort is targeted to a small population of underrepresented students, where power largely rests with those “currently advantaged” who “have disproportionate political influence over the conduct of schools—including school change efforts,” (Oakes et al., 2006, p. 5), teachers may find themselves faced with having to choose whether to adhere to or resist policies and practices that conflict with the broader school culture.
In short, school context may have an important role to play in how teachers make sense of, and thus implement, a reform effort that seeks to ensure equal opportunities for all students. Understanding how certain political, technical and cultural supports and constraints affect teachers’ decision-making on behalf of students, including their ability to function as empowerment agents, must be understood if we are to fully grasp the complexities in the mechanics of school change.

Through interviews with 10 teachers in four different suburban secondary schools, this study explores how teachers implementing a college-preparatory intervention program perceive and process their day-to-day interactions with students, with teachers’ narratives providing a window into what it looks like when teachers negotiate a variety of rules, mandates, and expectations when working with directly with students. Several frameworks guide analysis, including organizational learning, sensemaking, and technical, political and cultural dimensions of reform, along with Oakes et al. (2004)’s “critical conditions” for equity and diversity in college access. As such, my research questions are:

**Research Questions**

1. How do secondary teachers working in suburban schools enact the critical conditions of a college-going culture and institutional support in their everyday interactions with students enrolled in a college prep program?

2. How do secondary teachers make sense of their actions in the context of an intervention program and the broader school culture?

3. What is the relationship between school context factors (political, technical and cultural supports and constraints) and how teachers enact the critical conditions?

**Dissertation Overview**

The remainder of the dissertation begins with Chapter 2, which reviews some of the literature supporting the need for students to have access to a culture of college-going
and institutional supports on the path toward college, as outlined in the Oakes et al. (2004) Critical Conditions for Equity and Diversity in College Access framework. Chapter 2 concludes with an examination of the research regarding one particular intervention program designed to prepare students for college, along with research regarding how teachers make sense of school reform efforts generally. Next, Chapter 3 includes a discussion of the theoretical frameworks that guided analysis, including organizational learning theories (Argyris & Schön, 1978), sensemaking (Weick et al., 2005) and the technical, political, and cultural domains of school reform (Oakes, 1992). Chapter 4 then outlines the study’s qualitative design and methodology, which consisted of interviews and teacher narratives of interactions with their students. Two key findings are explored in Chapter 5, including:

From teachers’ perspectives, the degree of perceived campus-wide support for AVID stems in part from the relationship between schoolwide and AVID demographics.

Teachers respond to the degree of perceived campus-wide support for AVID by reconsidering the definition of an AVID student. This process has implications for equity and diversity in college access.

Chapter 6 continues by discussing a third key finding:

AVID teachers across contexts recognize and respond to institutional constraints in strategic ways, both in marshaling support for the program and in their everyday interactions with students.

A discussion of the three major findings, including implications for research, theory, policy, and practice, is in Chapter 7.
CHAPTER 2: CRITICAL CONDITIONS FOR EQUITY IN COLLEGE ACCESS

Introduction

Ensuring equity and diversity in access to college lies at the heart of school reform efforts nationally. While more underrepresented students nationally are attending college than in the past (Digest of Education Statistics, 2012a), degree attainment disparities still persist (Digest of Education Statistics, 2012b, 2012c). The 1995 University of California Regents decision to outlaw affirmative action at the university level led to stark decreases in admission rates for underrepresented students (Oakes et al., 2004). Following that decision, a 1997 blue ribbon UC Outreach Task force proposed several priorities for increasing enrollment of African American and Latino students in the UC system, but the task force and partners had only outcome data to rely on in measuring progress toward meeting university enrollment targets. Such indicators as standardized test scores and school Academic Performance Index (API) rankings “provided almost no clues about inequalities in learning resources and opportunities within schools or about the types of interventions that would be most effective in removing barriers” that researchers know contribute to differences in college-going (Oakes et al., 2004, p. 3).

In response to the dearth of reliable criteria by which to monitor progress toward achieving equity in college access, The University of California All Campus Consortium on Research for Diversity (UC ACCORD) surveyed existing research on K-12 schooling to create a set of “opportunity indicators” that could be “useful for informing efforts to make college access more equitable and for monitoring the impact of those efforts” (Oakes, 2003, p. 4). The seven “leading indicators” identified in the report include “conditions that students in educationally disadvantaged communities require for learning
and successful college preparation” (p. 9). The conditions are listed in Figure 1. While suburban schools in mostly middle-class neighborhoods may offer the majority of students access to each of these “critical” conditions, access for low-income as well as ethnic and language minority students in such schools is far from guaranteed. In fact, UC ACCORD data indicates that “the wealth of a community does not always predict the educational outcome for schools,” finding “compelling evidence that school context matters” (p. 8). And while having opportunities to learn is important for all students, “it is particularly important for subgroups of students who historically have been underrepresented in four-year colleges and, by extension, whose families are less likely to have higher education from which to draw guidance” (pp. 9-10).

Figure 1. Critical conditions for equity and diversity in college access (Oakes et al., 2004).

The “critical conditions” are meant to serve as a “comprehensive, research-based framework for understanding the barriers to equity in achievement and college-going” (Oakes, 2003, p. 1). To this end, the questions that guide this study focus on what we currently understand regarding the relationship between student achievement and two of the seven leading indicators: a “culture of college-going” and intensive academic and social supports (which I will call “institutional supports”). These indicators are most
closely associated with the cultural dimension of reform, the dimension that is hardest for reformers to address and is the least understood, but that arguably is most important if schools are to effectively disrupt the status quo and ensure equity of access to all students. Further, focusing on cultural conditions in schools recognizes that students’ choices regarding college-going are “affected by…the normative expectations that exist among” members of a school community” (McDonough, 1998, p. 186). Such “normative expectations” typically remain tacit, but understanding them are key to accomplishing the goal of “interrupting the patterns of inequitable college access requires that we better understand the consequences for young people across California’s diverse communities” (Oakes et al., 2004, p. 9).

**Overview: Literature Review**

This review begins with a summary of research supporting the two critical conditions that comprise the focus of this study: access to a culture of college-going and institutional supports. Often, research regarding student achievement is conducted in urban districts and in districts with high proportions of low income or ethnic minority students. In fact, much of the research Oakes et al. (2004) draw upon for their “critical conditions” framework comes from such settings. But with more ethnic minority students enrolling in suburban schools (Fry, 2009), high-performing, suburban districts have much to learn from research in each of these two domains.

After examining research supporting the critical conditions, I explore one reform that initially emerged as an effort to address the harmful effects of tracking, and that has, over nearly four decades, developed into comprehensive schoolwide model for change that seeks to narrow the achievement gap and prepare students for college.
The review continues by examining how teachers make sense of reform efforts generally, as understanding the role teachers play in enacting reforms will help us understand how institutional constraints and supports can affect students’ access to the critical conditions.

**Critical Condition: A Culture of College-Going**

In their framework for monitoring opportunity indicators for college access in California, Oakes et al. (2004) distinguish between a “college-going school culture,” in which all members of a school community, including teachers, administrators and students, expect that students will have “the experiences they need for high achievement and college preparation” (Oakes et al., 2004, p. 10), and a “multi-cultural college-going identity” in which individual students see college-going as part of who they are. As such, individual students who develop the “confidence and skills” to “negotiate college without sacrificing their own identity and connections with home communities” are more adequately equipped for academic success (p. 12).

For the purposes of this study, I have combined both conditions into one concept—a “culture of college-going” that includes the high expectations associated with rigorous coursework, and the belief among students that “college is for me.” These two features go hand-in hand. In a school that espouses the theory that “all students can and should go to college,” all students must believe the theory applies to them if they are to access associated resources. As Oakes et al. (2004) argue, students should be empowered to recognize that college is a pathway that is equally valued by their families, peers and local communities. Arguing that race and culture play an important role in developing students’ college-going identities, Oakes et al. (2004) recognize that students of color may
internalize the belief that “college is not for me,” presumably even within schools that foster a college-going culture. Such beliefs, Oakes et al. (2004) would assert, can adversely affect students’ long-term academic outcomes. Schools often adopt one of various outside intervention programs as a means toward ensuring equity and access to college, but various political and cultural factors affect the degree to which students buy in to the idea that college is “for them.” Intervention teachers are in a key position to help their students access the school’s culture of college-going through facilitating access to rigor and having conversations with students about what it means to go to college, i.e. maintain a “college-going identity.”

Drawing from research literature and from work with public K-12 schools, McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez (2002) identify nine “principles of a college culture” that form a “highly integrated, complementary system of ideas that draw and benefit from each other” (pp. 9-10). The principles are listed in Table 1. As McClafferty et al. (2002) point out, “preparing all students for a full range of postsecondary options is not a simple task” and requires “a variety of stances” and “must utilize all available resources” (p. 27). Changing the culture of a school is more “deeply-rooted and longer lasting” than focusing on individual students or isolated college activities (p. 28).
Table 1. Principles of A College Culture (McClafferty, McDonough, and Nunez, 2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College Talk</td>
<td>Clear, ongoing communications with students about what it takes to get to college.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear Expectations</td>
<td>The explicit goals of postsecondary options are clearly defined and part of the “daily culture of the school.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and Resources</td>
<td>Students have access to information and resources related to college while teachers also incorporate information into daily classroom practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive Counseling Model</td>
<td>All counselors offer opportunities for college counseling and all decisions about students’ schedules are made with postsecondary options in mind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing and Curriculum</td>
<td>Students participate in a rigorous course of study and have access to critical standardized college entrance exams.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Involvement</td>
<td>Faculty are knowledgeable about college requirements and play an active role in helping students “aspire to, apply to, and attend college.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Involvement</td>
<td>Parents and families become “informed partners” in the college culture development process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Partnerships</td>
<td>Field trips, college fairs and other programs help build relationships with local colleges and universities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulation</td>
<td>From kindergarten through 12th grade students experience a college-going process; schools vertically team to ensure a smooth transition through each stage of schooling.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rigorous Curriculum

Building a culture of college-going begins with making sure all members of the school community—teachers, counselors, administrators and parents—maintain high expectations for all students, “coupled with specific interventions” and information that emphasize college preparation as a “normal part of” their academic paths (Oakes et al., 2004, p. 10). Not only are advanced courses prerequisite for attending four-year
universities, but student participation in such courses in high school ensures that once students arrive in college, they are adequately prepared to persist. In fact, the overall rigor of high school students’ schedules is “the most powerful factor in increasing students’ chances for completing a four-year college degree,” an impact that is strong for students of color (Oakes, 2003, p. 3). Intervention program teachers, who often help students choose their classes and are integral to implementing practices designed to support students in their advanced classes, have an important role to play in helping ensure students of color attain and maintain access to rigorous coursework, which comprises an important component of the “college-going culture.”

The research around the importance of access to rigorous coursework largely comes from schoolwide efforts toward detracking—“moving from homogenous to heterogeneous instructional groupings” (Oakes, Wells, Jones, & Datnow, 1997, p. 487), that had long persisted in schools. For example, Burris, Wiley, Welner, and Murphy (2008) conducted a longitudinal study of the effects on student achievement when lower-track classes that enrolled disproportionate numbers of underrepresented and low-income students, “were gradually eliminated and replaced with heterogeneously grouped classes in a demographically diverse, suburban high school” (p. 578). Researchers found that over time, there was a significant increase in the probability of students earning both a state standards-based diploma as well as a diploma from the rigorous International Baccalaureate program. In fact, African American and Latino students qualified to receive free or reduced-price lunches saw an astounding five-fold increase in state diploma attainment. However, the authors concluded that simply eliminating lower-track classes was not enough, noting that “within the district there were shifts in beliefs, curriculum,
pedagogy and school culture [emphasis added], changes that accompanied the mechanics of
detracking and that educators at the school [viewed] as essential to the growth in both
Regents and IB diplomas” (Burris et al., 2008, p. 600). Teachers’ beliefs in their students’
abilities to succeed in rigorous coursework are expressed in their everyday interactions
with students, beliefs that both reflect and create a culture of college-going for all
students.

College-Going Identity Formation

Upon reviewing the research in this domain, several patterns emerged that limit
our understanding of how schools do or do not foster multi-cultural college-going
identities among adolescents. For example, some studies focus on how schools can
develop a general college-going culture, irrespective of the individual “college-going”
identities of the students involved (Jarsky, McDonough, & Nunez, 2009; McClafferty et
al., 2002). Others examine students’ individual ethnic or racial identities as they relate to
academic success (Kerpelman, Eryigit, & Stephens, 2008; Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry,
2006; Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005). Still others examine the impact of certain
elements of school culture on academic achievement, including cultural mistrust (Irving
& Hudley, 2005), social burdens accompanying high achievement (Tyson, Darity, &
Castellino, 2005), and perceived discrimination (Stone & Han, 2005).

Studies that come closest to examining the impact of a multi-cultural college-
going identity on student achievement examine the effect of the so-called “stereotype
threat” on student outcomes. Initially coined by Steele (1997), “stereotype threat” occurs
when members of a target group, to which certain stereotypes are applied, fear being
reduced to that stereotype. The concept is meant to account for differing levels of
achievement between women and men in the sciences, for example, or between black and white students, when all other factors, such as income, are accounted for. One such study utilized data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen in college, surveying over 4000 undergraduate students across twenty-eight academic institutions (Massey & Fischer, 2005). Researchers found that minority students in classes taught by white professors (circumstances the authors assert create conditions that increase the possibility of a stereotype threat) had statistically significant lower GPAs than did minority students in schools with a large number of non-white professors.

A mitigating force for the stereotype threat is the notion of “academic press,” which occurs when teachers place an “emphasis on students meeting academic standards and on achieving excellence (McDill, Natriello & Pallas, 1986)” (Phillippo & Stone, 2013, pp. 360–361). In fact, when teachers are academically lenient with students of color, even when it stems from compassion or other good intentions, it places them at an academic disadvantage (Ream, 2003). But when teachers maintain high expectations and provide academic support, students perform well (Lee & Smith, 1999; Oakes et al., 2004).

**Critical Condition: Institutional Supports**

Oakes et al. (2004) identify “intensive academic and social supports” as a key critical condition for access to college. In order for students to “navigate the pathway to college successfully,” they need support networks of both adults and peers who help students “access tutors, material resources, counseling services, summer academic programs, SAT prep,” college applications, and myriad other types of assistance (Oakes et al., 2004, p. 11). For the purpose of clarity within this study, I will generally refer to this critical condition as “institutional support,” with the assumption that such support
includes both academic and social domains. Institutional support plays a “pivotal role in informing and preparing students for college…particularly for low-income minority students who may not have the ‘social capital’ or ‘college knowledge’ necessary to negotiate the academic pipeline” (p. 11). This section reviews some of the research regarding the contribution that institutional support makes for students navigating the path to college.

Academic Support

Research linking academic support to student achievement also offers promising practices for educators. As Cooper, Denner and Lopez (1999) point out, “teachers—from any ethnic background—can…act as cultural brokers who help Latino children to succeed in school and achieve their dreams” (p. 52). In this vein, the following studies suggest a powerful link between school-centered, teacher-mediated academic support and student achievement.

In an effort to understand and combat the opportunity gaps in suburban school districts, a group of 15 high-achieving, upper income school districts across the Midwest and northeast combined to form Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN). As part of their efforts, they surveyed more than 34,000 students in grades 7-11 to see if they could detect factors that seem to influence minority students’ achievement (Ferguson, Clark, & Stewart, 2002). Overall, the research found that active teacher-student relationships may be “especially important resource for motivating black and Hispanic students” to succeed (Ferguson et al., 2002, p. 3). Using the “Ed-Excel Assessment of Secondary School Student Culture,” the survey found that while Hispanic and black students have lower test scores and grade-point averages, there are few racial difference
between white students and their Hispanic and black counterparts in terms of hours spent working on homework; only Asian students reported working more than the others. Further, black and Hispanic students were far more likely than white students to report that they work harder because their teachers “encourage” them to do so, while white students were more likely to work hard when “the teacher demands it” (p. 5).

Social and Peer Support

Teachers have an important role to play in helping facilitate positive peer-to-peer relationships inside the classroom, and thus how they navigate this “critical condition” with respect to students is critical for student success. Stanton-Salazar (2001) argues that students who develop positive peer relationships have a much easier time coping with stressful circumstances and succeeding academically. For example, in a mixed-methods study of Mexican-Origin adolescents in San Diego, Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2005) examined the circumstances under which students found the necessary support among their peers to withstand emotionally challenging conditions. Their findings suggest that students’ abilities to establish a “web of social support” from platonic friendships, school personnel and family members who were “rational, emotionally intelligent and responsive to the feelings and needs” of the students enabled them to persevere despite setbacks (p. 411). While the study does not specifically link students peer support networks to their long-term academic success, the authors’ findings suggest that:

enriching supportive peer relationships and networks…appear to buffer the adolescent from environmental stressors (e.g., intermittent family poverty, community violence, resource-poor schools) and to enable the adolescent to develop relationship-based coping strategies that foster resiliency (p. 411).
Likewise, in another mixed methods study, Zirkel (2004) found that among young adolescents of color in an newly integrated school, those who reported having more friends at school were more likely to be invested in their academic achievement. This finding furthered Zirkel’s hypothesis that “social relationships at school convey information to students of color that can facilitate their identification with academic work and achievement” (p. 68). For white students, however, the number of friends at school bore no relationship with academic engagement, suggesting that perhaps schools have a role to play in helping students of color on multi-ethnic campuses forge positive and academically oriented peer relationships that can support students’ academic engagement (Zirkel, 2004).

Moving from academic engagement to success, some evidence of the connection between positive peer support and academic achievement does exist. For instance, in a longitudinal study of elementary and middle school students, Azmitia and Cooper (2001) found that students who relied on their peers as positive resources were more likely to have higher school grades, a positive association that appears to increase as students move through school. In a related qualitative study of 116 adolescent Latino youth from low income backgrounds, Azmitia and Cooper (2001) analyzed students’ grades, application essays for a community college outreach program, as well as student work from a series of activities designed to elicit their college and career goals. Students who named peers as resources rather than challenges were somewhat more likely to enroll in a more rigorous math pathway. Students in both advanced and remedial math in the ninth grade were as likely to list peers as either resources or challenges to academic success, suggesting that while positive peer relationships may not cause academic advancement,
there exists an opportunity for schools to provide institutional support for students to build such peer support relationships that might mitigate any of the unsupportive or negative ones they develop outside the classroom.

Other studies have suggested an even stronger link between peer support and student achievement. Using information from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS), Horn and Chen (1998) found that “at risk” students (those from low SES or single parent homes, for example) whose peers planned to attend college, were four times more likely to attend a 4-year college than those who reported that none of their peers planned to attend college, even when researchers controlled for other factors.

As Zirkel (2004) notes, several factors might account for the correlation between the academic achievement of students of color and their social interactions, including discrimination, exclusion from academic-oriented groups, and “school and classroom climates” (p. 68). On this last point, one study used the Racial Climate Survey (High School Version) to investigate the association between racial climate, on the one hand, and achievement and behavioral outcomes on the other. While this study is more descriptive of reasons for achievement gaps, rather than evaluative of a specific intervention, the results are still instructive. Mattison and Aber (2007) found that positive perceptions of the racial climate were associated with higher achievement, and racial differences in students’ grades were associated with differences in perception of the racial climate. School-wide efforts to help students form racially positive, supportive peer relationships can go a long way toward buffering at-risk students against outside stressors that limit their academic potential.
The AVID Program

Perhaps the best-known academic support intervention that attempts to implement institutional supports and a college-going culture is that of the AVID program. AVID, which stands for Advancement Via Individual Determination, began as a response to the court-ordered desegregation of San Diego’s schools (Mehan et al., 2010). Rather than segregate students bussed in from ethnic minority neighborhoods in East San Diego into tracked classes, the Claremont faculty enrolled the students in a regular college preparatory curriculum (Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Lintz, 1996). An English teacher created an elective designed to support the students academically. The program spread to other schools in San Diego with the mission to “motivate and prepare underachieving students from underrepresented linguistic and ethnic minority groups or low-income students of any ethnicity to perform well in high school and seek a college education” (Mehan et al., 1996, p. 14). Today, AVID maintains the mission “to close the achievement gap by preparing all students for college readiness and success in a global society,” targeting students in the “academic middle” from all backgrounds, and serves nearly 300,000 students in over 4,000 schools across 45 states and the District of Columbia (AVID, 2016).

Students enrolled in the AVID program take college-preparatory and Advanced Placement classes, keeping with the AVID philosophy of “acceleration instead of remediation.” Students also enroll in the AVID elective course for one period per day, which teaches students organizational and study skills as well as critical thinking and questioning skills. Students also have the opportunity to get tutoring from paid college students who are trained to work with AVID students. In the content classes, teachers
who are trained in AVID practices also provide instruction designed to support students in their goals to prepare for the rigor of a four-year college curriculum.

Research on the effects of the AVID program indicates that AVID students attend 4-year colleges in numbers greater than the national average, are more likely to attend college the longer they remain enrolled in the program, and are remaining in college once they graduate high school (Mehan et al., 1996). In a study of the AVID program in a large Texas school district that compared schools that had adopted the AVID model to those that had not, researchers found that raising the performance of the “middle-performing” students targeted by AVID can raise school-wide academic indicators (Watt, Powell, Mendiola, & Cossio, 2006). AVID schools improved their accountability ratings over the non-AVID schools, with two schools moving from “acceptable” to “recognized” categories. AVID schools saw dramatic increases in advanced course enrollment and graduation rates. While this study examined whole-school improvements, research generally indicates that academic intervention programs like AVID can have dramatic positive effects on both individual student achievement and school-wide achievement indicators.

For schools looking to actively cultivate a schoolwide culture of college-going and provide students with academic support, the AVID program provides some technical knowledge to do so. Many lower performing schools that have adopted AVID schoolwide have seen dramatic improvements in students’ college aspirations and attendance rates (Mendiola, Watt, & Huerta, 2010; Watt, Powell, Mendiola, & Cossio, 2006; Watt, Johnston, Huerta, Mendiola, & Alkan, 2008). For schools that already maintain a schoolwide culture of college-going by virtue of their location in middle and
upper middle class neighborhoods and high percentages of parents with at least some college education, adopting a reform like AVID can enable them to reach segments of the student population not currently being served. In both cases, adopting AVID can trigger challenges to a school’s culture. In the former case, members of the school community recognize the tension as part of the reform process; in the latter case, the challenge can be unexpected, and thus unwelcome. In both cases, how teachers make sense of the role of AVID on their campus can affect the decisions they make with respect to students—in other words, how they enact the critical conditions for equity and diversity in college access.

The Role of AVID in This Study

Probing the tensions that arise when a reform is adopted in various settings is a major goal of this study; as such, AVID provides a fitting model for a reform in action. No matter how schools choose to adopt the program, certain features of AVID require that schools at least attempt to content with political, technical and cultural issues on campus. For example, fundamental to the program is the AVID elective, a course (or series of courses) offered within the school day that requires teachers, tutors, curriculum, allocated space in the master schedule, and a host of other technical and political resources in order for the class to run. Further, while AVID espouses a coherent, well-developed theory of action, it is nonetheless is modified when enacted in context. However, it must be noted that while AVID here is the common reform across school settings, this study is not a study of or about AVID or its effectiveness. Rather, AVID offers an example of a reform that is a) well-researched, b) widely implemented, and c) well respected. AVID has been adopted in over 4,700 schools nationwide, including over
1,400 in California alone. Its wide use and detailed implementation criteria make it a useful crucible in which to study reform in action. AVID also espouses a theory of action that focuses on several of Oakes et al. (2004)’s critical conditions, including the two that are the focus of this study (institutional support and access to a culture of college-going).

Interviewing AVID teachers has allowed me to focus on teachers’ sensemaking across contexts, without variability in reforms factoring too heavily into the analysis. Further, AVID offers a model of a reform that some schools adopt wholesale, while others adopt piecemeal, depending on student demographics and the school’s perceived needs. Reform advocates often like to point to successful models and argue that such successes be adopted across the board; such is the rhetoric that surrounds charter schools, for example. In fact, transferring a reform from one setting to the next without attending to cultural and political forces on the ground can complicate efforts at schoolwide change (Mehan, Hubbard, & Stein, 2005). Examining what complexities arise when implementing even a “successful” reform yields potentially powerful insight into how schools change, and how teachers make sense of those changes when interacting with students.

**Teacher Sensemaking of School Reform**

Understanding how teachers make sense of their roles—how they make decisions when balancing their own values and priorities against those of a given reform effort versus those of the broader institution—forms the basis for this inquiry. In this context, “reform” broadly refers to programs and policies that seek to change the way the school operates in order to ensure student access to the “critical conditions” for equity and access. Examples might include academic support classes, language acquisition programs, and programs for college-bound students; in this study, AVID serves as the reform in use.
Examining teacher decisions through the lens of sensemaking yields insight into “how teachers wrestle with issues of coherence” between differing expectations (those from the school site, from an external reform, or from other sets of expectations). Sensemaking “considers how local actors negotiate meaning from a variety of, often conflicting, messages they encounter in their local environment” (Allen & Penuel, 2015, p. 137). This review examines some of the research regarding how teachers make sense of school reform efforts generally, while Chapter Three discusses in more detail how the theoretical lens of sensemaking informs this study.

In a case study of an elementary school undergoing reading reform, Coburn (2001) found that, rather than working alone, teachers worked collaboratively to make sense of the reform’s expectations and meaning. Coburn developed a model for this collective sensemaking that highlighted three “subprocesses” (p. 152). In the first subprocess, teachers co-constructed understanding through interpersonal interaction, both in formal and informal settings, and those shared understandings persisted over time. In the study Coburn found that the configuration of collaborative groups significantly affected how teachers made sense of reform goals—the shared understanding each group developed depended highly on the worldview of the teachers in the group (p. 153). When teachers engaged in conversations about the reading reform in informal settings, they were more likely to gather with teachers who shared their worldviews. Such conversations did show some evidence of a pattern of “multiple, consistent, incremental changes in classroom practice,” (p. 159), though changes were not as transformative as reformers would have hoped. On other hand formal groups such as those formed during structured professional development meetings were more heterogeneous and yielded few changes in
classroom practice (p. 158). In both settings—homogenous informal collaborative groups and heterogeneous formal ones, teachers rarely questioned their worldviews or practices related to reading instruction.

In the second subprocess, teacher communities engaged in “gatekeeping” by either accepting or rejecting external messages about reading. Teachers had numerous reasons for rejecting ideas presented in the reform: they were “too difficult” for their students; they were “outside the bounds of comprehensibility” for students, they “didn’t fit” teachers’ own individual and shared approaches; or the ideas were simply unmanageable or teachers didn’t understand them (pp. 154-155). This gatekeeping obviously affected implementation of the reading reform in the classroom and over time.

In the final subprocess, teachers spent a great deal of time, over time, negotiating technical and practical details of implementation in an “iterative” process that was “shaped by worldviews, preexisting practice, and shared understandings” (p. 155). For example, when disagreements rooted in differing worldviews emerged between teachers regarding a practical issue (assessments), teachers’ worldviews shaped how they put assessments into practice, but their underlying views of the reading process were not changed (p. 156). Instead, they came up with a compromise solution that altered some teachers’ routines but didn’t change teachers’ underlying assumptions about how to best approach reading instruction.

Coburn’s (2001) work has numerous implications for a reform like AVID, which has detailed and complex prescriptions for curriculum guided by a worldview that espouses rigor for all students, yet is implemented by teachers in a variety of school settings who have their own worldviews and assumptions about student abilities, the best
ways to achieve a college education, how to best approach forming a students’ schedule, and many other cultural and technical dimensions.

Collaboration emerged as an important factor in teacher sensemaking in a more recent multiple-case study that explored how secondary science teachers made sense of science instruction during implementation of the Next Generation Science Standards (Allen & Penuel, 2015). Teachers were most likely to encounter ambiguity and uncertainty around such issues as “differing instructional goals, available accountability measures, and adequate resources” (p. 146). Further, differing views of the “value and purpose of reform proved especially challenging” (p. 146). The authors found that when such a lack of coherence emerged between external goals (those of the site and those of the reform) teachers were more likely to engage in “deep thinking” that more fully integrated the school site’s goals with those presented by the study if teachers had opportunities to meaningfully engage in “collaborative and sustained sensemaking” that allowed them to “work through incongruities they perceive[d] between goals and strategies promoted in professional development and goals and strategies promoted in their local educational contexts” (p. 147). This “sustained” collaboration allowed teachers to spend the time to consult resources, develop their own where existing resources were insufficient, and “explore [the] incoherence more deeply,” using their autonomy to make more considered decisions about practice (p. 146).

In the case of AVID, the national model calls for site-based collaborative teams, continued professional development and regular collaborative meetings that examine student data and curricular goals. Such practices are built into the external program assessments AVID uses to evaluate site adherence to AVID’s mission and goals. The
degree to which sites follow those guidelines varies widely. Further, teachers must make
dozens of decisions within the course of even a single class period, often without the
benefit of speaking to colleagues about day-to-day student needs. So understanding how
teachers make decisions during those everyday student interactions, depending on their
school context and their school’s cultural mores and expectations, will contribute one
dimension to our broader understanding of how teachers implement reforms generally.
Further, since “people help create the environment that they make sense of, as they make
sense of it,” (Everitt, 2012, p. 218) understanding teacher sensemaking at the micro level
might yield insight into the effect such sensemaking has on the broader culture of college-
going in a given school setting.

**Conclusion**

This review began with a summary of the research regarding the need for all
students to have access to a culture of college-going and institutional supports if they are
to have equitable access to college. Schools seeking to improve underrepresented
students’ access to college often adopt outside programs in order to address students’
needs. I reviewed the research on one such program, AVID, that serves as an example of
a reform in use. Finally, I concluded by examining how teachers make sense of reform
efforts generally so that we can better understand the sense AVID teachers make in this
study. The next chapter will explore the major theoretical frameworks that guided my
analysis.
CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Introduction

Having outlined the research underpinning the importance of institutional support and a culture of college-going to ensuring equity and diversity in college access, I describe in this chapter the theoretical lenses I used to investigate the three primary research questions that guided this study. For each question, I will foreground the primary framework that guided my analysis of teachers’ stories about their interactions with students and their experiences working in AVID program at their school sites. However, as these theories often overlap with and complement one another, I often drew from each of the perspectives at various times throughout my analysis.

Organizational Learning

Question One: How do AVID teachers working in suburban schools enact the critical conditions of a college-going culture and institutional support, in their everyday interactions with students?

Argyris and Schön (1978) offer helpful language for considering organizations in the process of change, and thus for answering my first question regarding how teachers enact the critical conditions for equity and access in their interactions with their students. Each teacher makes decisions about how to act on behalf of their students within the broader context of a school that has chosen to adopt the AVID program as a means toward some form of institutional change, even if the extent and type of that change varies from site to site. In fact, it is the variability in how each site integrates AVID and its goals into the broader goals of the school that creates an important variable for inquiry in this study.
Theory of Action

Connecting their previous assertions about the nature of individual learning, Argyris and Schön (1978) posit that “organizational learning might be understood as the testing and restructuring of organizational theories of action,” comprise of “certain strategies…norms…and assumptions” (p. 14). Within the “theory of action” lies the organization’s “espoused” theory, which details how that organization represents how it would “behave under certain circumstances” (p. 11), as well as the organization’s “theory-in-use,” or enacted theory, which governs the actions of the individual or organization as observed from the outside (p. 11). An organization’s espoused theory might be gleaned from reviewing formal documents, such as organizational charts and policy statements, while an organization’s enacted theory might be inferred from observing the “actual behavior” of the individuals within that organization (p. 12). Because the actions of individual members of the organization “manifest knowledge” that represents the organization’s enacted theory in different ways, it is impossible to create a complete picture of an organization’s enacted theory merely by observation (p. 16). In fact, very often, an organization’s enacted theory may remain “tacit,” even with insight from individuals. But the theory-in-use does account for an organization’s “identity and continuity” (p. 12) and is thus helpful for understanding how an organization functions.

In an educational context, students as “individual members” of the school organization “are continually engaged in attempting to know…themselves in the context of the organization” (p. 17). Classroom teachers are the most immediate and consistent points of access to the organization for students. As students “test their knowledge,” against the tacit norms of the school (in this case, the norm of “college-going”), they
draw conclusions that shape their own identities in relationship to the school’s enacted theory of action—with sometimes dramatic implications for their achievement outcomes.

In the case of schools adopting a reform targeted at a select student population, multiple theories of action combine, and even collide, giving rise to tensions that might complicate the manner in which teachers make sense of the reform’s efforts. For example, if teachers feel as though the organization’s actions vis-à-vis a given reform match the school’s broader goals, they may internalize that to mean they have the freedom to enact that theory of action freely. If instead teachers sense a wide gap between the stated goals of a reform and the school’s broader theory of action, there may be implications for their behavior within that reform. They may experience isolation, frustration or even resistance. Since teachers have a high amount of influence over the success or failure of an initiative or reform, understanding what helps teachers embrace or reject such reforms is crucial. If teachers feel powerless, they will enact that sense of powerlessness in the classroom, which has implications for student learning.

**Single Loop and Double Loop Learning**

In order for organizations to learn, Argyris and Schön (1978) posit that learning agents’ discoveries, inventions, and evaluations must be embedded in organizational memory. They must be encoded in the individual images and the shared maps of organizational theory-in-use from which individual members will subsequently act. If this encoding does not occur, individual members will have learned, but the organization will not have done so (Argyris & Schön, 1978, p. 19).

Individual teachers or counselors, along with students, might internalize the norms of a given reform effort, but if the organization does not fully adopt the espoused theory of the reform as its own more broadly, the social norms of the school don’t change, and the reform is thus left in constant conflict with the organization in which it’s embedded. In
In this case, “what individuals may have learned remains as an unrealized potential for organizational learning” (Argyris & Schön, 1978, p. 19). This kind of “single loop” learning is sufficient where “error detection,” in this case the error being gaps in access to rigorous classes or other opportunity indicators, “can proceed by changing organizational strategies and assumptions within a constant framework of norms for performance” (Argyris & Schön, 1978, p. 21). In the “single loop” approach, organizational actors are concerned mostly with “effectiveness—that is, with how best to achieve existing goals and objectives and how best to keep organizational performance within the range specified by existing norms” (p. 21).

As Hubbard et al. (2006) note, “when mandates place new demands on local schools…educators are apt to maintain previous routines while conforming to the new demands” (p. 9). Such an approach to school reform using this “single loop” model—adopting changes that only target “problems” in the organization but that do not require the organization to change existing norms—do not ultimately change the fundamental culture of the organization itself. In fact, “organizational strategies and assumptions…are modified so as to keep organizational performance within the range set by organization norms. The norms themselves—for product quality, or task performance—remain unchanged” (Argyris & Schön, 1978, pp. 18–19). In “extreme cases” school reforms can come to be “absorbed into the culture of the organization and thoroughly adapted to fit preexisting routines or standard operating procedures,” a process which can have a “neutral, positive or negative effect on the intensity and potential success of the reform” (Hubbard et al., 2006, pp. 9–10).
When schools adopt a reform that seeks schoolwide culture change, however, they can be said to be engaging in “double loop” learning. In such a scenario, the educators must be willing to conduct “inquiry” that will “take the form of a restructuring of organizational norms, and very likely a restructuring of strategies and assumptions associated with those norms, which must then be embedded in the images and maps which encode organizational theory-in-use” (Argyris & Schön, 1978, p. 22). Further, double loop learning involves “those sorts of inquiry which resolve incompatible organizational norms by setting new priorities and weightings of norms, or by restructuring the norms themselves together with associated strategies and assumptions” (p. 22). Undertaking such an inquiry is much more time consuming and involved than a “single-loop” approach, and while it’s not guaranteed to contribute to lasting organizational change, it does recognize that such change requires shifting much more than technical approaches. According to Argyris and Schön, “a process of change initiated with an eye to effectiveness under existing norms turns out to yield a conflict in the norms themselves” (Argyris & Schön, 1978, p. 21), but in order to change, organizations must “recognize the conflict itself” (1978, p. 21) in order for “double loop,” or system-wide, change to occur. If organizational learning does occur in the form of “consensus,” it is not the “automatic result of shared culture. Consensus is achieved, not given. It is achieved through negotiation and often strife, which means that it is fragile, subject to revision and change” (Mehan et al., 2010, pp. 109–110).

This clear but admittedly binary model of “single loop” and “double loop” learning within organizations might not be adequate to fully account for what happens when schools adopt reforms in different settings; this study seeks to test findings against
this model, using teacher perspectives as the window into the tensions that arise when organizations either do or do not approach organizational learning with a spirit of inquiry and a willingness to question and change underlying norms in addition to technical approaches.

**Individuals Within Organizations: Sensemaking**

Question Two: How do teachers make sense of their actions in the context of AVID and the broader school culture?

Organizational learning theory helps provide a framework for thinking about how organizations, in this case, schools, change. But understanding how individual learning interacts with organizational factors is also important. The framework of sensemaking offers a way to think about the complex interactions between teachers and other organizational actors and features that can shed light on how reforms interact with school contextual factors to either help or perhaps hinder student success.

In brief, “explicit efforts at sensemaking tend to occur when the current state of the world is perceived to be different from the expected state of the world, or when there is no obvious way to engage the world” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409). In such a situation, “small structures and short moments can have large consequences” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 410). In the case of teachers operating within a school setting, the everyday interactions they have with students, colleagues and other organizational actors can have an impact on how they understand perceived differences within the organization, whether they are differences in resource allocation, treatment of individuals by those in power or opportunities for success. If sensemaking is “about the question what does an event mean?” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 410), then how teachers make meaning of the “event” of a reform effort can have huge consequences for how teachers enact a reform.
Indeed, the stories that an individual develops in his or her sensemaking efforts are not so much about “truth.” Rather, they are “about continued redrafting of an emerging story so that it becomes more comprehensive, incorporates more of the observed data, and is more resilient in the face of criticism” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 415).

Teachers are constantly coming across new “data” that either challenges or affirms their own sense of the organization, the reform and their place within it. Of course this process has implications for identity development for teachers, and thus for their actions on behalf of students. As Weick et al. (2005) explain:

From the perspective of sensemaking, who we think we are (identity) as organizational actors shapes what we enact and how we interpret, which affects what outsiders think we are (image) and how they treat us, which stabilizes or destabilizes our identity. Who we are lies importantly in the hands of others, which means our categories for sensemaking lie in their hands. If their images of us change, our identities may be destabilized and our receptiveness to new meanings increase (2005, p. 416).

While all teachers are “advocates” to some extent, those who work with the most vulnerable populations (vulnerable to being ignored or left out of consideration when resources are allocated) encounter the organization in ways different from other teachers. How teachers make sense of who they are as “organizational actors” is likely shaped by their interactions with other organizational actors and the system more generally. For example, to what extent do teachers find themselves at odds with a school that may not espouse the same theory of action regarding student success as the reform they are implementing, and how does that positionality affect their decision-making? Conversely, when teachers are implementing a reform that is supported by the broader school culture, do fewer tensions arise? If so, how does that experience affect their decision-making?

What similarities and differences arise among the experiences of teachers in both school
settings, and what can we learn about educational reform more broadly by understanding those connections?

**Technical, Cultural, and Political Dimensions of Reform**

Question Three: What is the relationship between school context factors (political, technical and cultural supports and constraints) and how teachers enact the critical conditions?

As organizations, schools resist, change, and adapt to challenges to their identities. Oakes (1992) formulates three dimensions of school reform that provide a helpful framework for understanding how teachers’ decision making relates to the business of school reform for equity. The political, technical, and what Hubbard, Mehan, and Stein (2006) call cultural domains all emerge as important dimensions in teachers’ stories.

Technical approaches to reform seek to add to or modify available resources, including purchasing computers, changing the master schedule and sending teachers to professional development (Hubbard et al., 2006, p. 12). Political approaches include “galvaniz[ing] important political constituencies” and building relationships within and across agencies (p. 12). Finally, cultural approaches to school reform “engage educators’ values, beliefs, and norms, often on controversial topics such as the placement of teachers and the nature of intelligence and its distribution across race, ethnicity, class, and gender” (p. 12). Hubbard et al. argue that “the reform process benefits from balanced attention to all three dimensions” (2006, p. 14). As such, analyzing situations in which one “dimension goes too far ahead of the others” can help explain the “tensions” that result from such “imbalance” in the reform approach (p. 14).

But taking into account all dimensions of reform is not enough. While actors on the ground might buy into the goals of a reform, “improvement efforts are mightily
resisted if they threaten the logics of schooling—which is to say, if they alter the current hierarchy of school achievement that parallels parents’ wealth and power” (Oakes, Rogers, Blasi, & Lipton, 2006, p. 4). In the case of a reform that seeks to give certain students access to resources not available to other, more privileged students, members of the community, including teachers, may come to define the reform negatively so as to minimize its importance. Conversely, if more privileged parents are engaged in enacting the reform, the meaning of that reform might change, increasing chances that the wider school culture will become compatible with the goals of the reform. Further, those primarily responsible for implementing the reform—teachers—might come to define the meaning of the reform differently depending on how the reform comes to be defined culturally within that particular school, something that likely has consequences for student outcomes.

Oakes et al. (2006) argue that when reforms do fail, typically it is not due to technical challenges but to the cultural and political resistance such efforts face. The role of power must be considered, and as Oakes et al. (2006) argue, “the amount of power required is proportional to the degree of resistance the change engenders. Providing high quality education to all children, by virtue of their having a right to such an education is a big change that requires big power” (Oakes et al., 2006, p. 5). Without enlisting the support of powerful actors in a high achieving, higher wealth school, adopting a reform that seeks to empower underrepresented students will be doomed to failure if it only attends to technical matters, while ignoring “normative logics and beliefs” (Oakes et al., 2006, p. 4). The degree to which teachers, critical “actors” within a reform, feel they can act within the organization to affect change has implications for students’ access to the
critical conditions for equity and access. With power, comes agency. And with agency comes the ability of a teacher to help mediate the relationship between students and the institution, a relationship that is critical for students’ long-term success. If students can’t access the system, they are by definition outside of that system, and are more likely to be shut out of opportunities for advancement, rigor, enrichment and, ultimately, higher education.

Conclusion

Organizations are complex, and schools are no exception. In trying to understand how (or whether) schools adapt to meet the needs of underserved students, one must simultaneously attend to the dynamics that guide organizations undergoing change (Argyris & Schön, 1978), the political, technical and cultural realities that facilitate, impede or complicate that change (Oakes, 1992), and the sense that primary actors who are engaged in organizational change make on the ground in their everyday decision making (Weick et al., 2005). The next chapter describes how I designed a study that sought to answer the three questions that guided this study. Table 2 gives a brief overview of the lenses that guided analysis for each of the following research questions:

Question 1: How do AVID teachers working in suburban schools enact the critical conditions of a college-going culture and institutional support, in their everyday interactions with students?

Question 2: How do teachers make sense of their actions in the context of AVID and the broader school culture?

Question 3: What is the relationship between school context factors (political, technical and cultural supports and constraints) and how teachers enact the critical conditions within the AVID program.

However, as discussed throughout the dissertation, there is much overlap between the theories when making sense of teachers’ decisions in context.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical Framework</th>
<th>Question 1</th>
<th>Question 2</th>
<th>Question 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Learning (Argyris &amp; Schön, 1978)</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers Within Organizations: Sensemaking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Weick et al., 2005)</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political, Technical and Cultural Dimension of Reform (Oakes, 1992)</td>
<td>√</td>
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CHAPTER 4: STUDY DESIGN

Methodology

This study takes a qualitative approach, as it is primarily concerned with understanding how teachers “interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). A qualitative study allows for “rich description” (Merriam, 2009, p. 16) of teachers’ experiences and a deeper understanding of how teachers work within organizations to interpret and implement reform efforts. The primary methods of data collection include one-on-one interviews and weekly narratives (“stories”) provided by each participating teacher. Table 3 provides an overview of the research methods and corresponding research questions.

Table 3. Research Questions and Data Collection Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Phase One: Initial Interview</th>
<th>Phase Two: Interaction Narratives</th>
<th>Phase Three: Follow Up Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 1: How do AVID teachers working in suburban schools enact the critical conditions of a college-going culture and institutional support, in their everyday interactions with students?</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 2: How do teachers make sense of their actions in the context of AVID and the broader school culture?</td>
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<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 3: What is the relationship between school context factors (political, technical and cultural supports and constraints) and how teachers enact the critical conditions within the AVID program?</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At the outset, this study takes a primarily constructivist perspective, adopting the assumption that in making decisions about practice in schools, teachers bring a variety of interpretations of their experiences to the research setting, and the primary role of the researcher is to “construct” meaning using theoretical frameworks as a guide (Merriam, 2009, p. 9). However, I also took a critical approach in analyzing the data, as I found that the role of power, “—who has it, how it’s negotiated, what structures in society reinforce the current distribution of power,” etc. was a useful lens for understanding my observations” (Merriam, 2009, p. 10). For example, in contemplating the decisions teachers’ made when adopting the AVID program to “fit” their school’s demographics, I considered whose power within the school setting was challenged or supported by teachers’ choices. Further, I asked teachers questions designed to help me understand tacit political and cultural forces that guided that decision making, some of which had powerful implications for students who would (or would not) benefit from the AVID intervention.

**Positionality**

I came to teaching as a second career, after spending most of my 20’s working in the legal field. I sought a career that would give me the opportunity to affect students’ lives, empowering them to think critically, speak up, and find out who they are. In my early years in education I was not wholly aware of what I now understand to be my social-justice mindset; nor was I cognizant of what awaited me as I set about my purpose. As a white woman raised in the middle class who had used education as a means toward
success, I wanted the same opportunities for all of my students, especially ones who did not have the same privileges and opportunities that I did.

The questions in this study arise from my 12 years in teaching, including serving underrepresented students in a variety of reforms set within the context of a high-performing, suburban school with small populations of such students. In all those years, whether I was teaching English Language Development, working with long-term English Learners in an after-school academic support program, or advising AVID students, I experienced similar frustrations and delight. On the one hand, I found that when an adopted reform required institutional accommodation, very often the institution would resist, in both subtle and not-so-subtle ways. In resisting this change, the institution’s espoused goals of supporting students conflicted with the enacted reality on the ground, often hindering my efforts to meet students’ needs. On the other hand, I developed close relationships with my students as we both sought to understand and make sense of constraints and supports within the context of the school. More times than I can count I can remember finding myself saying, “I don’t know why they’re doing it this way,” referring to administrators or other adults on campus who appeared to be making decisions that ran contrary to student needs. As such, the issues I explore in this dissertation are of interest to me personally and professionally, while I also hope they will contribute to the academic conversation regarding how best to meet the needs of underserved students.

Agee (2009) argues that “developing qualitative research questions should include careful thought about how the direction of inquiry will position the researcher in relation to participants and what the implications are for participants’ lives” (p. 441). In light of
this recommendation, in selecting participants for my study I focused on inviting teachers to participate who do not teach in my own school or even in my own district. Given that my own teaching experiences are limited to two similar schools within the same district, I included teachers from outside my own teaching context so that I could limit the effect my own biases and past experiences on both data collection and analysis. Second, I had not met any of the teachers in the study except one, who I had previously met in at a professional conference not related to AVID. Incidentally, I did not discover this fact until I arrived in her classroom to start the interview. While I shared a broad set of teaching experiences with each of the teachers, which proved advantageous in that the teachers and I generally spoke the same “language” of teaching and reform, our mutual lack of personal and professional familiarity helped prevent participants from either assuming I understood something that I did not, or from withholding information out of a fear of appearing a certain way in front of a familiar colleague.

**Data Collection**

**Participants**

For the study, I interviewed 10 AVID teachers from four different suburban high schools in southern California. The teacher participants (Table 4) comprised a diverse group, identifying as White, Hispanic and Latino, African American or Multi-Racial. Half of the teachers were bilingual in Spanish and English, and all ranged in age from the mid-twenties to the mid-fifties. Most teachers had earned their Master’s degrees in education and all had received some AVID training, with several teachers having received extensive training over many years.
In order to identify potential sites in the study, I contacted the AVID Center and requested basic data on secondary schools in southern California. I was looking for programs that had been implemented with fidelity as evaluated using AVID standards. Once I identified potential school sites, I reached out to school principals (see Appendix B), requesting their assistance with reaching out to AVID teachers at their locations. Administrators in multiple districts agreed to allow me to contact teachers. I heard back from teachers at four schools, and all teachers who responded and agreed to the study participated. If teachers chose to participate, I contacted them directly to explain the rest of the study, giving them the opportunity to consent or decline to participate. Those who
did elect to participate received a gift card in appreciation of their time. An overview of the schools is provided in Table 5.

Table 5. Overview of School Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hope High School</th>
<th>Hidden Brook High School</th>
<th>Hidden Crest High School</th>
<th>Lone Lake High School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total School Enrollment</strong></td>
<td>2,500+</td>
<td>1,000-1,500</td>
<td>2,500+</td>
<td>2,000-2,499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total # Students in AVID</strong></td>
<td>350-400</td>
<td>0-50</td>
<td>200-250</td>
<td>150-200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 Year Average API</strong></td>
<td>825-850</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>850-875</td>
<td>850-875</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The Academic Performance Index is a single number that was formerly used to calculate “Adequate Yearly Progress” for all public schools. Due to changes in standardized testing, the California State Legislature approved a modified formula for schools to report their testing and other data. The new “3-Year Average API” is produced using each school’s past 3 API scores. Hidden Brook HS does not have a valid API score because it does not have 3 years of API scores (California Department of Education, 2014). Demographic and testing data are reported as ranges to maintain anonymity for each school site.*

**Phase One—Initial Interviews**

The study consisted of three phases, each answering different research questions with some overlap between each phase (see Table 3). Phase One included an initial hour-long interview with each participant, conducted in person at a site convenient for teacher participants. The primary purpose of the first interview was to ask teachers about their teaching assignments, their overall impression of their school site’s readiness and ability to meet students’ needs, and to gather some initial “stories” or narratives about their interactions with and on behalf of students (see Appendix A). Narrative inquiry enables researchers to attend both to the “personal conditions” of participants, including their “feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions,” as well as the “social conditions” of participants, including the “environment, surrounding factors and
forces, people and otherwise, that form the individual’s context” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). Given my focus on understanding school context as it influences teacher sensemaking, soliciting stories about teachers’ everyday interactions with students, which by definition occur within context, provided rich data that helped illuminate teachers’ experiences. I also used this interview to explain the second phase of the project, making sure that teachers knew what to expect and how to provide their insight during Phase Two.

**Phase Two—Narratives**

As Merriam (2009) notes, “the study of experience is through stories” (p. 202). Further, stories are a “portal through which a person enters the world and by which his or her experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477). One way to approach answering my second research question, which was “How do teachers make sense of their actions in the context of AVID and the broader school culture?” was to collect several stories from teachers about their everyday interactions with students. To that end, I invited teachers to send brief narratives three times per week for a period of about two weeks, totaling six stories for each teacher. Each story included a brief description of a single interaction the teacher had with a student that week (see Appendix A). For these stories, I was more interested in having teachers record *what* happened, than I was in having them reflect on *why* it happened or how they *felt* about what happened; rather, teachers’ sensemaking of the events they describe was the focus of Phase Three. In the recordings, teachers described what the student’s need was, how the teacher responded, and any other details about the interaction. The purpose of collecting several narratives over a two week period was to
gather a variety of student-teacher interactions in a set time period. Limiting the story collection period to two weeks kept the total time commitment for each teacher to a maximum of four weeks.

To submit their stories, teachers called in to a phone number that I created using Google Voice, leaving messages about interactions they had with students that day or in the past week or so. I used Google Voice because it allows users to leave messages of up to three minutes in length, and I could set up the account to go straight to voicemail, rather than ringing on a phone. Teachers with longer stories called back to finish telling them. Using Google Voice allowed teachers to call in at a time that was convenient for them, which they did. Early pilot testing had revealed that narrating brief interactions via audio took up much less time than did recording such a story by hand or by typing. Further, teachers reported that typing the story led them to edit their narratives more formally, whereas speaking their stories into an audio file was much more natural and conversational. Google Voice eliminated the need for teachers to carry around an audio recorder or create voice memos on their phones and e-mail them to me. The simplicity of the process helped make sure teachers weren’t burdened with a complex task.

As the stories came in, I then listened to and transcribed each of them. By soliciting stories each week as they happened, I hoped to capture stories as they unfolded. This “living inquiry” allowed me to explore “temporal changes in the past and in the unfolding present,” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 485), which offered surprises and more spontaneous information than I would have gathered by only collecting teachers’ past stories in interviews.
I had three reasons for collecting brief narratives over a period of weeks, rather than asking teachers to recall stories from the past. First, weekly submissions enabled me to collect, review, analyze and code the data close to real time, rather than after the fact. Second, I was able to capture a glimpse into the everyday interactions that made up the totality of the teacher/student relationship. Teachers process dozens, even hundreds of interactions and decisions daily. By collecting the data over a period of two weeks, I hoped to gather their stories closer to real-time than would have been possible with only one open-ended interview.

Finally, I wanted to gather a variety of student-teacher interactions that fell into each of the two “critical conditions” for equity and access that I was interested in: a culture of college-going and institutional supports. Therefore, I provided teachers with handouts describing the kinds of stories I was looking for, which included a prompt for them to follow (Figure 2). Soliciting stories across the critical conditions allowed me to look for patterns of teacher actions and sensemaking within each domains, yielding insight into how teachers enact features of those conditions with students in daily practice.

For the next two weeks, I will ask you to leave me voice messages telling me about your interactions with students. I would like you to submit three stories the first week, and three stories the second week. I am particularly interested in hearing about your interactions with students regarding:

1. A challenging or difficult concept, assignment or class, either within AVID or in another class.
2. Academic or social support, either in AVID or in another class.
3. College, preparing for college, or college-going, including conversations specific to AVID or not.

Figure 2. Prompt provided to teachers to use when submitting their stories about interactions with students.
Phase Three—Final Interviews

After I collected all the narratives from each teacher in Phase Two, I proceeded to Phase Three. This phase consisted of hour-long, open-ended interviews with each teacher. The primary goal for this final interview was to give teachers the opportunity to make sense of their own decisions with respect to the stories they told me over the previous two weeks, as well as make sense of the impact of the institution’s expectations (stated and unstated) on both their decisions and on the students. Given that in “qualitative studies…the ongoing process of questioning is an integral part of understanding the unfolding lives and perspectives of others” (Agee, 2009, p. 432), I crafted the questions for Phase Three based on what I learned from the initial interviews in Phase One and from the Phase Two narratives (see Appendix A). I found that seemingly simple interactions with students could yield a great deal of information about teachers’ perceptions and understandings of school culture, institutional mores and explicit rules, and the role each of these play in either facilitating or hindering student learning and access to resources. That insight emerged best from a semi-structured approach, allowing for teacher insights to emerge from open-ended questions, rather than through a series of prescribed, narrow questions.

Confidentiality

While I did not intend to collect identifying information about individual students or other adults, it is possible that teachers could have provided enough information during an interview or narratives that would enable a third party to identify an individual student or adult. In order to mitigate this risk, I asked teachers to either avoid using students’ and adults’ names during their interviews, or to select pseudonyms they can use.
when discussing a given situation. When teachers accidentally mentioned a student or adult’s name, I omitted that information from the written transcript using brackets, or I modified the transcript using text within brackets to disguise information that might make it possible to identify an individual person.

For Phase Two, I provided teachers with a printed copy of the instructions for how to submit the narratives (Appendix A). The instructions requested that teachers make their phone calls from a secure, private location so that their stories could not be overheard. Teachers were also instructed, verbally and in writing, not to include any identifiable information in any recording, either of the participant or any student or other person they may mention in their narratives. When such identifying information was provided, I omitted such information from the written transcript using brackets.

In order to protect teacher participants’ confidentiality, I used pseudonyms on all transcripts, audio files and throughout the dissertation. Only my faculty advisers and I had access to the matching information regarding each teacher participant’s real name and pseudonym. All audio files and typed transcripts were stored on my personal password-protected computer in an encrypted and password-protected folder.

**Data Reduction and Analysis**

A principal purpose of qualitative analysis is to “bring meaning, structure, and order to data…present[ing] the reader with stories identified throughout the analytical process, the salient themes, recurring language, and patterns of belief linking people and settings together.” Further, “stable patterns and themes—assertions that make generalizations about actions and beliefs that were observed—must be searched for repeatedly within the total data corpus, in a process of progressive problem-solving”
(Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). As such, when constructing my analysis of the interviews, I moved both from the “top down” as Erickson (2004) advocates, and from the bottom-up in an “inductive” approach that allowed me to locate findings in the form of themes and theories about what I was noticing (Merriam, 2009).

In addition, when describing and making sense of teachers’ stories, I focused on “understanding the meaning [teachers] have constructed, that is, how [they] make sense of their world and the experiences they have” in their respective settings (Merriam, 2009, p. 13). In essence it matters less whether what the teachers say is “true” in an objective, verifiable sense. Rather, what matters is the meaning teachers have made out of a given set of circumstances.

**Phase One**

The “top down” analysis began with a data memo upon completion of each first-round audio-recorded interview. In that data memo I recorded my initial impressions of the interview, noting what surprised me and what didn’t. I also noted when I felt my own biases affecting the way I heard each of the teachers’ stories, taking stock of my own experiences so that I could put them aside and listen for understanding without judgment.

With each successive interview, I compared my developing observations with new data, looking for patterns and themes and “testing” them against my previous observations. I then transcribed each interview using the software program InqScribe, adding to the data memo I created upon completing each interview. While transcribing is a time-consuming process, I found that doing it myself helped me process each interview more fully and more immediately after the interview itself. I focused my transcription on completeness based on my research questions (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1998).
Next, I printed and reviewed each transcript after transcribing it, making handwritten notes in the margins and keeping a log of emerging patterns and observations. Doing the initial review by hand (without software) helped ensure that I didn’t impose too many preconceived notions onto the data, allowing me to remain open to what emerged. After a first pass, I then used the software program Dedoose to begin to mark up the transcripts with codes that emerged from my first pass. I repeated this process for each individual interview. Upon transcribing all of the first round interviews, I returned to the full text of all interviews and re-read them, looking for patterns and aberrant themes that I may have missed before, while also looking for places where my initial observations present in the data. Since I had an opportunity to re-interview my participants later in the study, I made sure to write follow-up questions for each teacher that emerge from this first round.

Given that my questions somewhat assumed differences in teacher meaning-making across contexts, I was careful of imposing that assumption onto the data. To protect against this, when returning to the transcripts as a whole, I did not separate them by institutional context. While I was of course aware what type of school each teacher attended, I didn’t want to separate them in the analysis too overtly, thus almost ensuring that I found differences that may not be there.

In reviewing teacher talk about their experiences and impressions, I looked for metaphors that lend insight into their mental models for the meaning of the reform they are working with. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) point out, “metaphor is not just a matter of language, that is of mere words…human thought processes are largely metaphorical…[T]he human conceptual system is metaphorically structured and defined. Metaphors as
linguistic expressions are possible precisely because there are metaphors in a person’s conceptual system” (p. 6). Looking for teachers’ metaphors that encoded their experiences helped me formulate impressions of their own identities and the meaning they made of their roles in implementing reforms on behalf of underrepresented students.

**Phase Two**

Each week, as participants’ typed or audio-recorded narratives came my way, I transcribed and organize the data. My initial pass at each teacher narrative was inductive—I primarily tried to understand what happened. I also coded each narrative for the degree to which each story fell into the three “critical conditions” that are the focus of this study, including access to a culture of college-going and institutional supports (Oakes et al., 2004). I then constructed follow-up questions about teachers’ sensemaking, including why each event unfolded as it did. My questions focused on understanding why teachers made the decisions they made, what they would have done differently, and what impact they think each situation had on the student.

After I completed all data collection, I returned to teachers’ stories and looked for patterns both within each participant’s series of recorded interviews and between participants’ stories. I then used that information to compare results from the final round of interviews in which teachers made sense of their experiences, focusing in on my research questions regarding how teachers made sense of institutional goals and expectations with respect to the students they serve, across school contexts.

**Phase Three**

After I collected teachers’ stories about their interactions with students, I met with each participant for a final, follow-up interview. Before transcribing, I added my first
impressions and thoughts about the interviews to the data memos I created for each participant after the first interviews. I also began to list early potential findings and questions that I wanted to return to upon further analysis. For transcriptions, I used a professional transcriber for the final round, mostly in order to save time and focus on data analysis. I printed the transcripts and added them to the data binder. My first pass through the data, much like during Phase One, was by hand and included notes and observations in the margins.

Analysis Post-Data Collection

Once I had collected all data—two rounds of teacher interviews and nearly 60 teacher stories—I used Dedoose to conduct a more thorough, systematic review of the data, looking at first for codes that I culled from the research, and then for other codes I created from observed patterns. As I completed each interview, I returned to previous interviews to make sure to look for any new codes that I had identified and to double check my own code applications.

The first category of codes I applied to the data included teachers’ enactment of the critical conditions. I created a list of codes by reviewing the Oakes et al., (2004) framework for the critical conditions for equity and diversity in college access. When reviewing teachers’ stories for ways they enacted high expectations in their everyday interactions with students, an important feature of a culture of college-going, I found cases where teachers did the opposite—they sometimes demonstrated low expectations in their decision-making. So I added “low expectations” as a code in that category. Another emergent code was “getting to know students as individuals,” which included teachers’ efforts to find out more about students’ lives both in and outside of school. I
nested that new code within the broader critical condition of institutional support, as teachers most often got to know students individually while in the process of providing some kind of academic or social support. Table 6 provides summaries of key ideas underpinning the critical conditions, along with predetermined and emergent codes, with the latter presented in italics.

In reviewing teachers’ interviews and stories, I distinguished between their “espoused” theories of action and their theories in use for each of the critical conditions (Argyris & Schön, 1978). As described in Table 6, for each critical condition I observed, I had two versions: enacted and espoused. For example, teachers sometimes spoke about the importance of advocating for students (espoused theory of intuitional support), and separately told stories about times when they took action to provide resources or information to a student (enactment of institutional support). Creating a way to distinguish between teachers’ espoused values and their actions helped me see differences and similarities between how teachers spoke about the critical conditions and how they enacted them with students.

In addition to the viewing the data through the lenses of theory of action and the critical conditions, I also added an additional layer that accounted for the Oakes (2002) framework for dimensions of reform. Table 7 provides summaries of key ideas supporting the technical, political, and cultural dimension of reform, along with predetermined and emergent codes, with the latter presented in italics. As with my review of teachers’ enactment of the critical conditions, I observed new patterns I had not previously anticipated in my initial code list. In reviewing teachers’ descriptions of the AVID program on their respective campuses, for example, it became clear that the
perception of AVID from setting to setting varied, but fell into some broad categories. As such, I added two categories underneath the broad label of “AVID’s role on campus,” which fell within the political domain. The first category accounted for times when teachers felt that AVID was either marginalized, disrespected, or invisible on campus, while the second category noted times when teachers felt that AVID was either valued, supported, or respected on campus. Figure 3 provides an example of how I applied some of the codes to one teacher’s story about her interaction with the student. In that example, the teacher enacts the critical conditions of facilitating access to a culture of college going and access to institutional supports, and the student’s life circumstances create a cultural constraint that AVID has helped address.
Table 6. Key Ideas and Sample Codes for the Critical Conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical Condition</th>
<th>Key Ideas</th>
<th>Sample Codes*</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| A Culture of “College-Going” (Oakes et al., 2004) | Teachers act to:  
- Provide specific information and encouragement about college  
- Encourage students to take challenging classes  
- Eliminate “school-sanctioned alternatives to hard work and high expectations” (p. 10)  
Teachers believe:  
- All students can achieve at high levels  
- College preparation is “normal” for all students, not just the select few | Enacted/Espoused:  
- Keeping up on Student Progress  
- Providing Information & Resources  
- High Expectations (Low expectations)  
- Inquiry, Questioning as Habits of Mind  
- College-Going is “for me” (College is only for select few)  
- Persistence through challenge  
- Provide rigor  
- Show students possibilities |
| Institutional Supports (Oakes et al., 2004) | Teachers act to:  
- Facilitate close, supportive relationships  
- Develop support networks of adults and peers, and provide students’ access to them.  
- Work as “cultural brokers” within and outside the school setting.  
- Provide access to resources (SAT prep, counseling, coaching, scholarships, etc.) | Enacted/Espoused:  
- Advocate for students  
- Facilitate access to resources  
- Facilitate close, supportive relationships (mentor, cheerleader, caring/compassion, parent figure, role model)  
- Act as “cultural brokers”  
- Parent contact  
- Teach students responsibility and accountability  
- Empower students to act as self-advocates  
- Create a support network of adults/peers  
- Provide tutoring and direct instructional support  
- Get to know students as individuals  
- Provide highly individualized support |

*Codes listed in italics were added to the code book while reviewing the data.
Table 7. Key Ideas and Sample Codes for the Dimensions of Reform

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Key Ideas</th>
<th>Sample Codes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>“Means of distributing school resources” (Oakes, 2002, p. 18). Changes in school organization, curriculum, teaching, etc. (Oakes, 2002).</td>
<td>• Technical constraint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Technical support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Practice is shaped by political interests and constituencies (Oakes, 2002, Hubbard et al., 2006).</td>
<td>• Political constraint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involves “granting of permission, taking of risks, redistributing power, forming coalitions” (Oakes, 2002, p. 19).</td>
<td>• Political support</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Struggle among individuals and groups for comparative advantage in the distribution of school resources, opportunities, and credentials that have exchange value in the larger society” and includes “highly charged issues of race and social class stratification” (Oakes, 2002, p. 13).</td>
<td>• AVID’s role on campus:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>marginalized, disrespected, invisible</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• AVID’s role on campus:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>valued, supported, respected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• AVID student &amp; program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>definition</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• AVID changes: driving</td>
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<td></td>
<td>forces</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Data: Systematic Use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>Reforms have a “web of cultural assumptions about what is true—what is ‘normal’—and cultural values about what constitutes appropriate action given particular ‘truths’” (Oakes, 2002, p. 12).</td>
<td>• Cultural constraint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Norms” guide decision making (Oakes, 2002).</td>
<td>• Cultural support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reforms must engage educators’ values, beliefs and norms (Hubbard et al., 2006).</td>
<td>• Schoolwide college-going culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Codes listed in italics were added to the code book while reviewing the data.*
Joy: I had a girl from UC Riverside come back. She said, “Mrs. ____ you were right. I was so disappointed when I didn't get into [CSU]. I was so scared that UC Riverside was too far away.”

Because her parents don't even have a car—they've never had a car. So to go all the way to UC Riverside—she had never been to a theater because they were so poor, never been to a mall, and to get into UC Riverside was just too overwhelming and too far away, but she really, the whole “UC thing.” I had signed her up. I had given her recommendations to get this amazing scholarship, and so that gave her a lot of help, too, so through AVID, she got a [a $16,000] scholarship. She got a lot of guidance.

Through AVID, we went and looked at UC Riverside last year on a field trip. She said, “Ok, I think I can go here. I can go here.” So she came home. She has no ride, always has to be a friend of a cousin's who brings her back. But she’s so happy, and fits in so well, and loves everything about UC Riverside.

If it wasn't for AVID, she never would have visited it, nor would she have had the courage to go far away because her parents didn't want her to go. In fact, her parents didn't want her to go to college because they were hoping that she would get a job, and would kind of help with meeting ends, you know, get a job and help make the rent. The family is, you know, I believe in a one bedroom apartment. I've taken her home before and picked her up, trying to get a job. So this was a huge, huge, huge jump for her. First of all to try to go to college when her parents didn't want her to and then go out of town.

Figure 3. An example of how I applied various codes to one teacher's story about an interaction she had with a student.
Limitations & Implications for Findings

Validity

The biggest factor threatening internal validity in this study is the relatively small sample size—the likelihood that the patterns I noticed are “real” in terms of teachers generally is reduced with a small number of teacher participants. Having a small number of participants could affect my ability to make claims about phenomena I have seen within my sample set.

There are several ways I have attempted to improve validity of my findings, most having to do with how I approached data analysis. Reviewing the data inductively, returning to the data multiple times to verify patterns, and looking at the data from multiple points of view helped me support my findings with adequate evidence. In supporting my findings, I looked to include several points of evidence across interviewees that supported my claims. Whenever a teacher in a particular school site commented on a political barrier to getting access to resources, for example, I examined responses from other teachers at that same school site to see if similar issues arose. In some cases, they did not, while in other cases teachers spoke the same language regarding the challenges they were facing. In the findings chapters, I note times when teachers’ observations were either in line with or in contrast with one another.

Finally, I provided visual aids in my data analysis section, similar to those recommended by Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002), that outlined the code mapping process I conducted during the data reduction and analysis. Such visual tools offer clear, accessible ways to represent the process a researcher uses to distill initial patterns and codes down to key findings.
There is some risk that my own bias as a classroom teacher—especially my own past frustrations navigating programs that target support toward underrepresented students—has colored my analysis. I have taken two steps to minimize this effect. First, prior to conducting interviews, I wrote out stories from my own teaching that guided my research questions, including my feelings and theories about how and why events unfolded. The process of “bracketing,” which involves setting aside “prior beliefs about a phenomenon…so as not to interfere with seeing or intuiting the elements or structure of the phenomenon” at work (Merriam, 2009, p. 25), allowed me to identify and account for my own biases prior to interacting with teacher participants. Second, I included teachers in the study who work in settings quite different from mine, a critical move that has helped me assess whether my own observations are specific to that setting, or whether there are differences between settings that warrant discussion. In fact, the heart of the study comes from the question, “Is it just me?”

Finally, there are some limits to this study when it comes to external validity and generalizability, most notably due to the relatively small sample size. However, I think the small sample size also has some advantages. Teachers don’t often have the opportunity to tell their stories about how they view their relationships with their students, how the make decisions about them, and what factors influence both, for the positive or the negative. Most teachers would argue that it’s in the day-to-day interactions that broad, systemic problems tend to show themselves. So much of our discourse about education is about systems, but we don’t often consider what it looks like on the ground to be implementing interventions, or what challenges teachers face when negotiating those reforms in relation to actual students given their school contexts. Looking at a smaller
group of teachers but more deeply can help lend support for broader findings across other research domains. In addition, the sampling method I have used is purposeful—I chose teachers from different types of school sites (by student demographics) allowing for comparisons across contexts, and I chose teachers who have some primary responsibility for working with the students I am interested in learning about. Such teachers a have a set of shared experiences that by virtue of their teaching assignments have yielded some noteworthy observations about those assignments.

Reliability

Merriam writes that

“[b]ecause [in qualitative studies] what is being studied in the social world is assumed to be in flux, multifaceted, and highly contextual, because information gathered is a function of who gives it and how skilled the researcher is at getting it, and because the emergent design of a qualitative study precludes a priori controls, achieving reliability in the traditional sense is not only fanciful but impossible” (p. 222).

She further argues that “if the findings of a study are consistent with the data presented, the study can be considered dependable.” So my primary goal has been to ensure that I have extensive support for claims I have made, and that I am open about the relative strength of those claims. The language I have used to describe my findings is critical here—I have been careful neither to overstate nor understate the “strength” of my claims, and I have been open about potential alternate explanations when they have emerged. This “analytic openness” (Anfara et al., 2002, p. 28) provides enough information for any reader to evaluate my decision making and the support I provide for my claims and findings.

In addition, having two interviews separated by time, along with two or more weeks of stories between those interviews has given participants multiple opportunities to
provide a range of experiences and interpretations for me to consider. So rather than just having one opportunity to gather teachers’ perspectives, I had multiple pieces of data from each teacher to examine. Keeping good records of my analysis helped ensure that my discussion accounts for my decision-making along the way. This “audit trail in a qualitative study describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry” (Merriam, 2009, p. 223). I kept an ongoing typed journal, in addition to data memos, that tracked my thinking and decisions over time, sharing those writings with colleagues and my advisers when I wanted to clarify or validate my own impressions.

**Summary**

This qualitative study focused on AVID teachers’ experiences and their stories about the work they do with students to enact the critical conditions of a culture of college-going and institutional supports. Ten teachers from four Southern California suburban high schools participated in semi-structured interviews and submitted multiple narratives about their everyday interactions with students. In conducting the analysis, I sought to “interpret [teachers’] experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute[d] to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). In Chapters 5 and 6, I provide “rich description[s] of teachers’ experiences and a deeper understanding of how teachers work within organizations to interpret and implement reform efforts” (Merriam, 2009, p. 16), taking into account how school context factors related to teachers’ actions.
CHAPTER 5: DEMOGRAPHICS AFFECT HOW AVID IS PERCEIVED AND DEFINED

Introduction

In designing this study, I sought to examine context-based cultural, political and technical factors that related to teachers’ decision-making when enacting the critical conditions of a culture of college-going for all students and institutional supports.

Specifically, my research questions were:

1. How do AVID teachers working in suburban schools enact the critical conditions of a college-going culture and institutional support in their everyday interactions with students enrolled in a college prep program?

2. How do AVID teachers make sense of their actions in the context of an intervention program and the broader school culture?

3. What is the relationship between school context factors (political, technical and cultural supports and constraints) and how teachers enact the critical conditions within the AVID program?

To answer these questions, I selected schools that had a variety of features in common in order to bring to the surface differences between schools based on the features that distinguished them. For example, all four schools in this study are public, serve suburban communities, and offer a comprehensive high school model. Further, all schools are considered “high-performing” by virtue of standardized test scores and other publicly available outcomes data. Next, all four schools provide the critical conditions for equity and diversity in college access that are not the focus of this study, including safe and adequate school facilities, qualified teachers, family-neighborhood-school connections around college-going, and a rigorous academic curriculum (Oakes et al., 2004). Finally, all four schools put forth an espoused theory of action that includes support for college-going for all students, a theory enacted by virtue of having adopted AVID, a program
that seeks to “close the achievement gap by preparing all students for college readiness and success in a global society” (AVID).

But there are critical differences between the four schools that contributed to a phenomenon that emerged in conversations with teachers across all settings, a phenomenon that became a variable that affected how teachers responded to political, technical and cultural constraints when enacting the critical conditions. The degree to which AVID is supported and respected by the broader school community is that variable, and emerged as a factor that affected teachers’ responses to student needs. This chapter will first outline where AVID falls at each school site on a continuum from marginalization to schoolwide support. I will describe each setting, including demographic features, and explore teachers’ thoughts about the relationship between those features and the relative esteem AVID is granted on campus. As such, the first half of this chapter outlines the support for the first finding:

From teachers’ perspectives, the degree of perceived campus-wide support for AVID stems in part from the relationship between schoolwide and AVID demographics.

In the second half of this chapter, I will more closely examine how teachers at three schools responded to the political tensions that arose when AVID targeted a population of students that differed from the broader school population. That section outlines support for the second finding:

Teachers respond to the degree of perceived campus-wide support for AVID by reconsidering the definition of an AVID student. This process has implications for equity and diversity in college access.

A discussion of the findings from this chapter, along with a third finding detailed in Chapter 6, will follow in Chapter 7.
**Demographics Influence How AVID is Perceived on Campus**

Having taught in a high performing school with a relative low percentage of low-income and underrepresented students on campus, I had some sense that a school’s demographics might have a role to play in how AVID was perceived on campus. But I was not prepared for how consistently teachers across all settings identified demographics as a factor that teachers feel affects how AVID is perceived in their respective settings.

This section explores the finding that:

> From teachers’ perspectives, the degree of perceived campus-wide support for AVID stems in part from the relationship between schoolwide and AVID demographics.

**Schoolwide Support for AVID: “Hope and Opportunity”**

Hope High School (Hope HS) provides the best example out of the four schools in this study of an AVID program that has broad support and that is fully integrated into the school’s culture. AVID’s wide acceptance and support at Hope HS is no accident—teachers have worked for over a decade to build the program from the ground up.

Chapter 7 explores some of those efforts in more detail. This section will focus on exploring teachers’ explanations for how AVID is perceived and supported on campus. All three teachers I interviewed mentioned how administrators both on site and at the district level show support for the program in responding to AVID teachers’ requests, especially for technical resources like time for field trips, school supplies, and AVID tutors:

Joy: [The administration] is always really positive—they show up to our site meetings. They work really hard to say yes to anything that doesn’t cost money, and money is harder for them to say yes to. But like, field trips, and what not, if we can come up with the money, even if it’s at a sticky time, they're more apt to say yes.
They provide—we talked about how important it was to provide planners. So they worked out a way to provide planners to everyone in the whole school. So, they try.

---

Richard: They're very supportive. The principal is able to kick in funds to us to help us get more AVID tutors. We have a district coordinator, plus our secondary instructional person at the district office. She's very supportive of the AVID program. So we usually find money to help support all the AVID programs, to find money for the AVID tutors.

Further, Jessica explained how content teachers at the school support the program in their classes by welcoming AVID students and supporting them in their efforts to access rigor:

Jessica: I think our AP teachers never discriminate. They're completely open access, and they never complain about "those AVID kids," or "that group." You know, they're just welcoming, and they try to work with kids. I think that our vision, our principal's vision is "High Expectations in a Nurturing Environment," and I think that's true. It's been communicated across campus in what I see kids being expected to do.

Finally, not only does the administration value and support AVID, but the school's staff enacts high expectations and college-going for all students on campus regardless of income or background. For example, Richard described how administrators and teachers collaborated to find a solution to the problem of low- to middle-income students not qualifying for Advanced Placement test fee waivers because they just barely missed the income cut off:

Richard: [If] you're just slightly, over $1000 over the income you don't qualify. So you're starting to take all these AP classes, AP tests it becomes a financial burden for parents. So what can we do as a school to support those kids who are in the middle income?

What we've done actually this year is teachers do a fundraiser. And what they do is the school puts on a Saturday school where we try to recoup
our ADA\textsuperscript{3}. And so then what we have now is teachers are able to raise the ADA funds in their classes and then what a lot of the teachers do is use that money or try to buy resources or materials that they need for their class. And so what some AP teachers done is taken that money and now if there's a student that comes in in their particular class saying, "I can only afford two tests, I can't afford your test" so what the teachers are doing is saying, "I will pay for your test because I have some money."

SV: And you guys aren't taking a salary?

Richard: It's volunteer work. So that's a way for us to volunteer and make some money for our programs.

SV: It's pretty clever.

Richard: We got it approved so it's kind of nice. So once again, the good thing about it is that we're raising those ADA funds but it's still being used for those student purposes.

At Hope HS, teachers and administrators have fostered schoolwide commitment to provide services to all students. Compared to other schools in the study, there appears to be little political resistance to mobilizing support for those who need it most. This commitment to equity falls in line with the AVID mission of narrowing the achievement gap, making AVID part of how the school goes about the business of improving access to college:

Jessica: [AVID] is providing hope and opportunity to the less served. That's exactly what the goal is of our program, and [the principal] says that all the time, and I keep thinking about that. And he challenges our staff: “How do we provide hope and opportunity to the kids who need it the most?”

\textsuperscript{3}In California, schools receive funding based on “Average Daily Attendance,” which is defined as “the total days of student attendance divided by the total days of instruction.” If a student is absent, his or her school does not receive money for that student’s attendance that day (California Department of Education, 2016).
Demographically, Hope HS has the highest percentage of students on Free and Reduced Lunch\(^4\) (45%) of any school in the study, with 67% of students within AVID qualifying for the program (Figure 4). It is also the only school in this study in which Hispanic and Latino students comprise the majority of the school population (55%), with 82% of AVID students coming from that group. Richard, who previously taught at a mostly white, higher income school, noticed a substantial shift in the amount of support for AVID once he joined the faculty at Hope HS, specifically citing demographics as a contributing factor to that difference:

Richard: Then I come here and it’s a whole different shift. They’re very supportive. They need to kind of focus on the kids. It became a point of trying to help out every single disadvantaged student regardless of who they were. And with the growth of our program and the amount of students that are Free and Reduced lunch, we’ve grown substantially. I think that’s because of the demographics that we have—very different.

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\(^4\)“Free and Reduced Lunch” refers to The National School Lunch Program, which “is a federally assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions. It provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to children each school day” (USDA, 2016b). To qualify for reduced lunch prices, a family of four can earn no more than $44,863 annually, 185% of the federal poverty line of $24,250. To qualify for free lunch, a family of four can earn no more than $31,525 annually, 130% of the federal poverty line (USDA, 2016a).
In exploring the role demographics plays in how AVID is perceived, Richard pointed to students as one driving force for support, along with administrators at the middle school and the district office:

Richard: I feel that if you end up having a lot of kids that are Free and Reduced lunch you have a lower socioeconomic background, first generation kids, and those kids are talking to all these other kids about the benefits of being in AVID. It kind of filters all the conversation so they’re more willing to come in.

Richard's observation that “kids are talking to other kids about the benefits of being in AVID” speaks to the influence a critical mass of support can have on a reform. Students become one of several “constituencies” driving support for the reform, in addition to administrators at various sites, content teachers, and others, so that AVID becomes just another path among several to reach college, one that students view as a desired commodity (Hubbard et al., 2006; Oakes, 2002). When I asked Jessica about the overrepresentation of Latino students in the Hope HS AVID program relative to the school population, she explained that some students—those who already have parents with college experience or who have other means of access (structural or otherwise)—just don’t need AVID, and that is ok:

SV: It looks like Latino students relative to the overall school population are overrepresented? Why is that?

Jessica: Because, I mean, low income, first generation, that's on the application. That's kind of a complaint from some non-AVID students, is that some students would like into AVID, but they don't qualify. They see the application. "Mom, can I be in this program? It says you need to be a first generation college student." No. And in a sense, I think they'll be fine. They don't need us. They'll be fine with their moms. And that's great. That's what we want for all kids. But they see that. It's right on the application so it weeds them out in a sense.

Jessica’s view of AVID acknowledges the structural barriers in place for some students to gain access to college, barriers that are not experienced equally by all students. In this way,
AVID becomes a tool for addressing societal inequities, a task seemingly made easier on a campus that both espouses and enacts a mission of equity and diversity in college access. Espousing and enacting the goal of college access for all students appears to be come more complicated, however, when AVID itself does not receive the same level of support as exists at Hope HS.

**Existing at the Margins: “Hidden” AVID**

If tensions on campus within and outside AVID stemming from demographics went largely unmentioned in interviews with teachers from Hope HS, they played a prominent role in interviews with teachers at Hidden Brook High School (Hidden Brook HS) and Hidden Crest High School (Hidden Crest HS). At both schools, teachers indicated that AVID does get some support from site and district administrators, but also reported the sense that the program takes a back seat to other priorities. At Hidden Brook HS, the AVID program is new and developing, but still largely falls outside the main priorities of the administration, at least through the eyes of the teachers. This attitude toward AVID at Hidden Brook HS begins at the district office, and is most apparent in teachers’ frustrations with getting college tutors for their classes:

Katie: If I was queen for a day I'd say our district overall [needs to improve]. We really need to work on tutors. I mean the tutor situation is really tough in our district. And so I don't feel, I feel like [students have] lost out for a couple of years now. We just can't get them. It's really tough to get them and keep them.

The other AVID teacher, Humera, linked the tutor issue not only to the technical problem created by a lengthy hiring process, but also to the district’s demographics:

Humera: That’s been the biggest issue with the program is I feel like the district—it’s not a priority to them of getting us these tutors.

SV: Why do you think it’s not a priority?
Humera: Well just the process in getting hired is really lengthy. They have to get approved by the school board and it takes about a month from the time that they get accepted and then they go through the clearance, because they’re hired through the district instead of through an outside program...I mean I just don’t think that—in this district a lot of things are run by the parents, the wealthier parents, the ones that have a big voice and everything, and these kids are not—their parents are not going to speak up for them and the district knows that, so these kids get pushed to the side. I just don’t think that they take AVID as seriously.

The district’s somewhat hands-off approach toward AVID trickles down to the school site. For example, Humera described trying to coordinate a visit to the middle school to recruit incoming eighth graders into the AVID program, an important part of most schools’ efforts to support and grow their programs:

Humera: Then we had these days saved up so we could go to the middle schools and recruit and do interviews. And there was one day where they said it was going to be a half day because we were only going to one middle school so I was going to have to miss my lunch and my 4th period AVID and come back and teach 5th. So it was going to be a half day. I was not supported because I had to find a teacher to cover my 4th period AVID, then I had to get a sub for one period. No teacher responded. I said, “They’ll work on anything. They’ll work alone. You can just sit at my desk.” No one responded. The front office told me I’d have to figure it out and get a sub, and I just felt like I wasn’t being treated as a professional.

Humera’s struggle to get sub coverage for her classes is just one example of many stories in which teachers’ efforts to gain access to technical resources became overtly political issues. In effect, the technical becomes political for teachers, and when the AVID program itself feels marginalized to teachers, that political struggle can be quite frustrating. Humera explained her frustration over limited time in the school day to devote to AVID business, a technical constraint that teachers at all school sites mentioned:

Humera: I mean it’s either department meetings and I can’t miss that, or it’s planning with my [English] partner and I can’t miss that. The only time is when it’s—sometimes they give you time on your own. I could do that but I don’t like doing that because I’m like “I want that time in my
classroom to grade,” you know because I’ve given up that time once or twice for [other] things and I’m always like, “Oh, if only I had that time.” So then to give it up for AVID planning would be nice but it’s just frustrating. You just feel pulled in so many directions. I’ve given up my prep several times and gone down and kind of talked to [my AVID colleague] during my prep because she has AVID during that time and we just kind of talk. I did interviews for kids that are current freshmen that want to join AVID next year. I did that during lunch with her and then during my prep as well I had a group come up. So we just kind of fit it in when we can, but it sucks.

At Hidden Brook HS, teachers across departments have dedicated time to meet on a weekly basis to plan instruction, but time is not set aside for the AVID team, so teachers must find ways to fit it in. Limited time becomes a technical constraint that teachers must contend with, and it affects them both professionally and personally.

Figure 5. Hidden Brook High School's demographics schoolwide and in AVID.

An examination of Hidden Brook HS’s demographics (Figure 5) lends support to Humera’s concern about “wealthier parents” getting more attention from the district and school site. Schoolwide, just 19% of students participate in the Free and Reduced lunch program, compared with 65% in AVID. Further, only 22% of the school population is Hispanic or Latino, compared with 79% within AVID. While at Hope HS “overrepresentation” of underrepresented groups within AVID appears to create
relatively few political and technical roadblocks for AVID teachers, at Hidden Brook HS such a wide disparity between school and AVID demographics adds to the perception of AVID as being “only” for certain students, a dynamic that contributes to the relative low esteem in which AVID is held on campus:

Humera: We are still looking for the kids that would be underrepresented on a college campus, so minority students, although we’re trying to open it up to more. Some of those kids get intimidated or they think they don’t belong there because they’re not Hispanic or black or whatever.

SV: Do you think there’s a stigma attached to it?

Humera: Yes, yeah there’s—We’re slowly fixing that but there has been a stigma. I mean even like my brother’s like, “Oh isn’t that for the—?” I don’t know why—I don’t know if it’s just in this community or what. I’m like, “No. They have to have a certain GPA.”

Responding to my characterization of AVID as having a “stigma” attached to it, Humera spoke gingerly about that reality, hinting at a tension between the school’s broader makeup and the demographics in AVID, a tension that contributes to this “stigma.”

As Humera wrestled with gaining access to certain resources, in part due to the relative low status of AVID compared to other programs, so did teachers at Hidden Crest High School (Hidden Crest HS), who reported similar struggles. There, the AVID program has been in place for many years, but due to a high degree of turnover in administrators, AVID teachers and coordinators, the program has only recently become more of priority for the site:

Chris: I feel AVID has been put on the back burner. We did go through a principal change…But I feel AVID was not on the top of the priority list prior to [this principal]. Now it’s growing a little bit. I feel like they hear us a little bit better. So we are trying to make some changes.

While there are positive developments at the site, the program still remains at the margins. In fact, all three teachers used the same word to describe AVID, mostly as a function of
AVID classes being held at 0 period, a daily class that starts before 7:00 a.m., outside of the main school day:

Sean: You look at ASB, you look at the sports program, you look at other stuff on campus, AVID's kind of just hidden in the back.

—

Michele: I don't know how well other students know about AVID. I don't know if we're really out there because we are 0 period. It's—we're kind of hidden. I don't know how out there we are.

—

Chris: I feel like the AVID awareness is predominantly produced by us as AVID teachers. So maybe something on the bulletin, here and there, or on the announcements. Because we're kind of, unacknowledged, like I said, AVID is either described as a "do your homework" class, or "I don't know what that is." I think more people should know what it is.

SV: Well, it's also not integrated into the school day. It's mostly separate.

Chris: Yes, it's true. It's a little bit hidden.

This technical constraint of AVID being placed at 0 period (with the exception of one freshman class) has contributed to a political constraint of minimal schoolwide support for the program, a program that is largely “hidden” from view in both a literal and figurative sense.

AVID’s reputation among the more affluent, white parents also affects how the program is viewed broadly, according to Sean:

Sean: Honestly I think a few of [the white/affluent parents] don’t actually think their kids need the help, but they also look at AVID as it’s affiliated with just a Hispanic program. I think they look at it like that and their kids look at it like that and they don’t want to be affiliated with a Hispanic program rather than looking at the statistics and looking at the overall program itself…but I think that’s why. I really think that’s sad, but that’s what it is.
Where Humera at Hidden Brook HS spoke gingerly about schoolwide demographic factors contributing to a negative perception of AVID, Sean at Hidden Crest HS was much more direct in his assessment, pointing out that students “don’t want to be affiliated with a Hispanic program.”

![Hidden Crest High School Demographics](image)

Figure 6. Hidden Crest High School's demographics schoolwide and in AVID.

As with Hidden Brook HS, the demographics at Hidden Crest HS yield some insight into this dynamic (Figure 6). Schoolwide, about 36% of students qualify for the Free and Reduced Lunch program, compared to 47% in AVID. More striking is the fact that while 41% of students at the school identify as Hispanic or Latino, 80% of students in AVID do. As with Hidden Brook HS, this “overrepresentation” of underrepresented students contributes to the marginalization of AVID on campus, even though there are far more low income and underrepresented students at Hidden Crest HS than at Hidden Brook HS.

Demographics alone cannot account for the negative perception of AVID at Hidden Crest HS, something that becomes clear when comparing the school’s demographics to those of Hope High School (reproduced below in Figure 7), which are
remarkable similar to those at Hidden Crest HS. Indeed, both schools enroll students from some of the same communities. What seems to matter, then, is the perception of demographic disparities between the school at large and those within AVID. And if perception is what matters, then it could conceivably be changed over time with attention to these issues.

![Figure 7. Hope High School's demographics schoolwide and in AVID.](image)

**AVID Is Supported, But “Isolated”**

The third and final dynamic that emerged in terms of AVID’s support on campus occurred at Lone Lake High School (Lone Lake HS), a school that previously experienced similar issues to those now occurring at Hidden Brook HS and Hidden Crest HS. But the AVID teachers at Lone Lake HS put in place a number of changes that have contributed to a turn-around of sorts regarding the relative support for AVID on campus. The next section of this chapter will explore the decisions teachers made to orchestrate the turn-around in more depth. This section explores how AVID is currently perceived on campus.

On the one hand, teachers at Lone Lake High School reported that AVID is mostly supported by administrators:
Heather: So the last two years, admin support has been fantastic. [The principal] has done a great job. As we've tried to refine and define our program, he's been a big part of that. He better understands what we do, so when we come to him and say, "Hey, we need this," he gets why. And we can have that conversation.

—

Manuel: I was just telling the [AVID] team the other day like I don’t think our principal has ever denied one of my requests, not one. A lot of the requests were monetary, money for subs for fieldtrips, gosh just money for lunches for AVID site team. You know a lot of it is money and he gets that, but he also attends our AVID recruitment nights. He comes to AVID site team meetings. He doesn’t come to all of them, and I get it and that’s fine, but he’ll tell us…And then a lot of times you know you get stuck like systematically, how can we do certain things where you need your principal's opinion, and he’s always there. They appreciate what we’ve done and what we’re doing.

One change the AVID team made to garner administrative support was explaining in clearer terms to school leaders exactly what the program needed, which not only yielded more technical resources but also vital political support:

Manuel: It's shifted, the perception from on our team, like [the AVID team] now understands admin's willing to help us. We've just got to tell them how to help us, which in my opinion is a great luxury knowing that whatever we say, they’re going to do, because they understand that they don’t know what to do, so they leave it in our hands. It's like, “Cool. Let us just go with it,” so it's fun.

Not only did administrators need to build trust in the AVID team, but AVID team members took awhile to trust that administrators would respond to their needs. Such trust-building takes years.

While administrative support for AVID has grown, the site team at Hidden Crest HS still sees room for growth:

Heather: Our AP is a little bit more disconnected. She just hasn't been at everything. [She is also] our district director, who is on our campus. And that’s just an attendance issue. I think she thinks she understands more than she actually does just because she hasn't been there at the ground level with some of the work we're doing.
Support among content area teachers is also improving at Lone Lake HS, but as with administration, trust in the AVID process takes time to build:

Manuel: There are those teachers that still have that same perception as when I came in, but I think as a result…I think evidence that it’s changing is how our site team has grown. We have about 25 teachers on our site team…We have, I’d say, 80% attendance because teachers sometimes just can’t make the lunch meetings, but I think that in itself is evidence of a shift. We’re still working on it, and I told the team when we first started, I said, “This is going to take years. It’s not going happen in one year. It won’t happen in five years.” You’re talking about shifts in the way teachers think about thinking and what we do.

On the other hand, despite increasing administrative support, teachers still feel that AVID is somewhat isolated from the rest of the campus:

Manuel: The role it plays right now it’s a program that helps kids but I feel like we’re isolated. I think everyone on campus has a general idea, a mid to low idea of what we do, but they do know that we’re trying to help kids, but it’s only the AVID kids. Those are those kids. That’s where we’re at right now.

![Lone Lake High School Demographics](image)

Figure 8. Lone Lake High School's demographics schoolwide and in AVID.

Looking at Lone Lake HS’s demographics (Figure 8) can yield part of the explanation as to the degree of support the AVID program receives. Lone Lake HS enrolls only about 7% of students who qualify for the Free and Reduced Lunch program,
with 10% of the AVID population qualifying. And only 10% of the school population identifies as Hispanic or Latino, compared with 21% inside AVID. In addition, 47% of students at the school identify as white, versus 41% in AVID, and 34% identify as Asian, versus 23% in AVID. So, for the most part, the AVID demographics mirror the school’s demographics much more closely than at any of the other schools in the study. And this is by design—in reforming the program, the AVID teachers changed how they recruited students, setting aside demographic characteristics like income and racial or ethnic background, in favor of other, less obvious factors:

Heather: After looking at the data, we realized, ok, parent education is a big piece where we differ, so that we might focus there. Other than that, it's the extenuating circumstances that really drive the kid in the AVID program. Otherwise they look exactly the same as the other Lone Lake HS students on paper in terms of GPA, demographics—all those quantifiable pieces. So we realized, "Ok, we have to speak to kids that have an extenuating circumstance gap."

The decision to modify AVID’s criteria had some unintended consequences for students at Lone Lake HS, which I will explore in more depth shortly. For now, it is enough to acknowledge that Lone Lake HS does enjoy a relatively high degree of support on campus, with some exceptions and caveats.

Summary

This section explored the first finding, that from teachers’ perspectives, the degree of perceived campus-wide support for AVID stems in part from the relationship between schoolwide and AVID demographics. Schools fell into one of three broad categories in terms of AVID support: schoolwide support, mostly marginalized, and supported but isolated. Table 8 provides a brief overview of how teachers across school sites described the perception of AVID on their respective campuses. The next section
will explore one set of responses to the political constraint of a negative perception of
AVID on campus, with particular focus on one school’s years-long retooling.

Table 8. Perception of AVID As Seen Through Teachers’ Eyes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schoolwide Support: “Hope and Opportunity” (Hope HS)</th>
<th>Existing at the Margins: “Hidden” AVID (Hidden Brook HS &amp; Hidden Crest HS)</th>
<th>AVID Is Supported, but “Isolated” (Lone Lake HS)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“[Administrators are] very supportive of us taking academic trips to colleges and universities. We always work it out so they’re able to support us in that. So that’s always nice. There’s not that much resistance.”</td>
<td>“But then sometimes I just don’t think they understand. I wanted them to come, they were doing instructional rounds one time and I was like, ‘Somebody please come watch AVID so you know what it is we’re talking about.’ Sometimes there’s just a lack of understanding of this is what it’s like in the trenches and in here…You know it’s just little things that…until you’re an AVID teacher it’s hard to understand some of the concerns that come up.”</td>
<td>“AVID fits nicely into intervention, and intervention is always a place of growth for schools. And so districtwide they wanted to help use AVID as a place where kids can get the interventions they need for the exact same reasons we just talked about.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“[AVID students are] highly respected. Teachers like AVID kids. I think there’s a general positive perception of our AVID program here.”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>—Jessica</td>
<td>—Richard</td>
<td>—Heather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Being in AVID, the kids wear their shirts all the time. They’re really proud. Some of them wear them every day. They’re proud to be in AVID. They’re screaming, yelling when we go on a field trip. They’re proud to be in Hope HS AVID. It gives me goose bumps just thinking about it because they’re really proud.”</td>
<td>“[I would like AVID to be perceived] like a strong normal program, mainstreamed, respected and other teachers really respect the program, say, ‘Wow you’re an AVID student,’ and educated on exactly, ‘What is AVID?’”</td>
<td>“For AVID we said, “Well let’s just let teachers observe a tutorial.” And teachers that I would have never, like those negative Nancies, personally came to me and said some positive things about tutorial. I’m not saying that they’re all in for AVID but we’re getting there. But teachers have to be willing to just give it a shot, you know…we’re getting there, but there are still some negative perceptions, and its ok. We’ll just work towards that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—Joy</td>
<td>—Humera (Hidden Brook)</td>
<td>—Manuel</td>
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“Re-Branding” and the Search for Legitimacy

One of the most salient ways teachers reported attending to the political context at their school sites was in how they have worked to define AVID, including who the “target” AVID student is for their programs. This response gives rise to the second finding of the study:

Teachers respond to the degree of perceived campus-wide support for AVID by reconsidering the definition of an AVID student. This process has implications for equity and diversity in college access.

Such redefinition did not occur at Hope HS, where AVID more closely mirrors the demographics of the school and little tension arises due to differences in demographics between AVID and the school site. There, AVID teachers still recruit traditionally underrepresented students at the college level:

Jessica: On the application I ask that they meet one of three criteria. Either they're [a] first generation college student, low SES where they qualify for Free and Reduced lunch, and the third way I always give an out, is special circumstances, so if you don't meet the first two, they can write about any adversity they've had, or show determination in their paragraph, because they write a paragraph applying to AVID.

As discussed earlier, the AVID mission at Hope HS mirrors the mission of the school (to provide “hope and opportunity” to all students), as well as the mission of AVID nationally (to narrow the achievement gap).

However, at all three of the other schools, teachers expressed a need to modify the program’s target audience to fit with the demographics at the site. This priority emerged with teachers at Hidden Brook HS, where the program is relatively new and that started in a district that provides less support for AVID than it could. Both Katie and Humera described a desire to recruit a more diverse group of students into the program, both teachers tying that desire to the goal of countering a negative perception of AVID:
Humera: But at this school I think we’ve been trying to just fight the perception of what AVID is. What the kids think is it’s for Mexicans and it’s for low kids and it’s for kids that are struggling. That’s what kids have told me, and so it’s slowly—we’re really trying to change the image and I think we’re doing a good job. It’s growing…I think we’ve tried really hard to change the perception and to get kids of all backgrounds to want to be in the class. And we’ve been working really hard to help the teachers understand because some of them were still confused about what AVID is.

As Humera implied, “Mexican,” “low,” and “struggling” have almost become synonymous in the cultural milieu, a perception that makes it harder for teachers to marshal political support for the program, and thus for the students it serves. Katie cited a shift in the national AVID model in articulating her desire for a more diverse program:

Katie: AVID's kind of changed their mission statement in the past few years, and it's not—trying to get away from what AVID's kind of been stereotyped as. I don't know if in your school community but in our school community often times it has a negative connotation of being for Hispanic kids only, and they're not doing well in their classes, and so this has been our first year to push and break that stereotype. We're trying, and so we're getting kids from the honors teachers. We're trying to pull kids from all different backgrounds and make our AVID class reflect the overall school culture too. And yes, we still definitely, if you're first to attend college in your family. But it's beyond that. It's, you know, there are some kids that have a single parent at home. There are some kids that have two amazing parents at home but they don't know how to support them.

Despite Katie’s characterization, AVID still maintains the goal of narrowing the achievement gap, but added the goal of targeting students in the “academic middle” in the 1990’s when race-based affirmative action policies were abolished at the college level in California’s public universities (Mehan et al., 1996). I followed up on Katie’s desire to make the AVID classes “reflect the overall school culture”:

SV: So you talked about reflecting the population of the school. Can you talk a little bit about why you think that’s important?

Katie: I don’t want it to be a class just for this particular type of student or just for this race of students because it can in our district. I mean we’re
about 30% Hispanic, 30% or 40% White and then in between. I want the AVID class to reflect that. It shouldn’t be just the Hispanic kids in my class, which it can typically be, especially in the middle school level. So you know we have some African American kids now. We have some Filipino kids. We have some white kids. So we’re slowly starting to grow for it to not just be just this type of class, and then understanding that it doesn’t matter your race, ethnicity, anything, that there’s many, many different reasons why a kid would join AVID and it’s not just because of their socioeconomic status.

Implied in both Katie and Humera’s desire for a more “diverse” AVID population is that enrolling more white students and fewer students of color could increase the program’s perceived legitimacy, an observation that has some merit in an educational system that reproduces social inequities along racial and class lines (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

At Hidden Crest HS, where AVID has been long established, teachers commented on their perception of an increase in enrollment from more wealthy, white families as contributing to a “divide” on campus:

Sean: If you look at our population we get a lot of kids from one of the middle schools. The other middle school we get a few and the program’s going down because the parents [from that school] don’t want them in the program because they look at it differently. And that’s a fight. And it’s tough. I’ve talked to people and directors in districts up in LA, the big dogs in AVID and they’re like, “Wow you’re right. We’ve seen it on one side and the other side, but you’re unique. We’ve never really seen it down the middle, coming from a lot of money to nothing.” So it’s a divide. So then you have—and my struggle now recruiting I have a huge population of maybe Asians and White kids and they’re looking at AVID you know as a program just for Hispanics and for kids that have maybe Cs and not AP kids. It’s a huge divide so they don’t want to come into the program.

A look at Hidden Crest HS’s demographics complicates this perception. The school has nearly the same percentage of White and Hispanic or Latino students, with roughly a third qualifying for Free and Reduced Lunch. And within AVID, Hispanic and Latino students comprise 80% of the program’s population, which contributes to the “divide” Sean identified. But looking at historical data for the school, it appears as though the
relative makeup of the student population has remained largely unchanged in the past ten years—there doesn’t appear to be as dramatic a shift as teachers perceive, which perhaps speaks to shifts in power having a big impact on school culture, whether or not demographic shifts occur at the same time.

As with teachers at Hidden Brook HS, Sean expressed a similar desire to change the face of AVID, using a marketing metaphor to explain his rationale:

Sean: So it’s about educating these parents, and that’s what we’re trying to do. I’m trying to expand and educate the parents: it’s not about this, it’s about kids going to college. So we’re kind of re-branding our school and our AVID program and say, “Hey it’s not about this. It’s not about ‘you have to be the first to go to college.’ It’s about if your kid wants to work hard, they want to go to college, they need a little support. Maybe you’re not home all the time, maybe they need a little boost. Whatever it is it’s a college prep course. We want to get you there. That’s the program.” So that’s why we’re trying to educate the parents. And you see it. I talk to parents. I’m in the community all the time talking to parents, and the first they’re saying [about AVID] is, “Oh, isn’t that class for Mexicans, or is it for Hispanics?” No it’s not actually. It’s for everybody. So it’s about educating one by one and then as a group. But there is a divide.

Sean identified higher income parents as the ideal target for “re-branding” the program—a strategy that recognizes the relative power such parents have in guiding technical resources toward their own students (Wells & Oakes, 1996). Sean appeared to believe that building support for AVID would increase its legitimacy, using such language as “hard work” and “college prep” when talking to parents, in an apparent effort to convince parents that AVID’s values are indeed the same values held by these middle-class families.

When I followed up on Sean’s statement about increasing the diversity in AVID, he responded quickly:

SV: Do you think that that would change the way AVID’s perceived if it was more diverse?

Sean: Oh yeah.
In hearing Sean’s comments, I made a connection between changing the make-up of students in AVID and how that might change the way AVID was perceived, and when I asked Sean about that connection, he responded emphatically and right away, even if it was in response to my framing.

While the conversation about “re-branding” emerged both at Hidden Crest HS and to some extent Hidden Brook HS, at Lone Lake HS it emerged as a major driving force for change within the AVID program. Lone Lake HS provides an opportunity to examine such a “re-branding” effort that has had more time to unfold.

**Lone Lake High School: A Case Study on “Re-Branding”**

Lone Lake HS provides a clear example of what it looks like for a site to undergo a deliberate period of “re-branding” and re-assessment of AVID’s mission on campus in response to numerous site-based cultural and political constraints. About five years ago, AVID teachers at Lone Lake HS looked at a variety of factors in assessing the needs of the AVID program and its students, including a lack of administrative support, budget cuts, the Common Core initiative, a highly competitive college-going culture schoolwide, tensions between students within the AVID elective, and a negative perception of AVID on campus (Figure 9). Each factor contributed to a redefinition of the AVID student that has had implications for AVID’s success on the campus and for historically underrepresented students. This section will briefly address each factor that drove change, then explore changes the teachers made to the AVID mission in response to those factors, and finally assess the impact the changes have had on the site. For this section, I have chosen to minimize my own commentary in deference to teachers’ thorough and clear explanations of their rationale. In Chapter 7, I will offer a more critical exploration
of teachers’ decisions within the context of organizational change theories and the literature on school reform.

**Driving Forces for Change**

![Diagram showing factors influencing organizational change]

Figure 9. Factors that influenced a redefinition of the AVID student at Lone Lake High School.

When the reassessment of AVID at Lone Lake HS began, AVID teachers noted some resistance on the part of the administration, mostly owing to a lack of understanding on the part of administrators about the goals of AVID on that campus:

Heather: The site was more resistant and not—it wasn't an active resistance. I think they just didn't understand what we did in AVID. And as we were trying to switch, we were unclear as to what we were switching to, and so that made it really hard to communicate to administration, "Here's what we're doing, and here's what we need," because all they saw was the old way of what we were doing, and it wasn't working.

Manuel, who had a great deal of AVID experience before joining Lone Lake at the beginning of its internal assessment of AVID's mission, noted the degree of frustration teachers were coping with:

Manuel: [AVID teachers] were so frustrated with admin. I had the luxury of just coming in with a blank slate, and hearing them in my interview, and listening to their concerns I realized that [admin] just didn’t know
what to do. They understood that there were problems here but they didn’t know what to do. So my advice to the AVID team was, “Relax. Let’s not be angry, but let’s instead provide admin direction. They need to know how they can help us. They have no idea.”

AVID teachers also noticed how new mandates associated with the Common Core initiative were affecting AVID students’ success in their content classes:

Heather: So after about four or five years of that it became clear we had to switch models. And that also was right around the time when the budget cuts happened, and our class sizes went up, something's got to give. And also our program was struggling at that point to match what was going on with instructional changes. So, we saw Common Core before it arrived, and we were looking at things like our note checks. We were checking the quantity of kids' notes and not the quality of kids' notes. And so our program—the relevance of it, the helpfulness of it—was waning for kids because they were taking all these notes but still getting a C because they way teachers were assessing kids was changing, and we weren't helping them match that change. So it was pretty clear that we needed more training and more teachers that were willing to look at how we change the instruction of AVID so that it's relevant and helpful for our kids who can get a C on their own, and Lone Lake HS is a pretty challenging school. So if a kid is getting a C on their own, how can we get them to that B or A point, because it's not quantity of notes, or it's not more studying. We have to change what they're doing.

Budget cuts, the adoption of the Common Core curriculum, and a willing but confused administration team all combined to drive the reassessment.

The AVID teachers at Hidden Crest HS were also concerned about the perception of AVID on campus, a concern that also factored into their “re-branding” efforts. Content teachers seemed to have strong negative feelings about the program, feelings that stemmed from comparisons between AVID students and mainstream Lone Lake HS students:

SV: What was the perception of AVID at the time?

Manuel: When I got here that AVID kids were dumb, lazy…

SV: It was that stark you think?
Manuel: Oh yeah, yeah and there’s still a little bit of that, but I think the staff is starting to see an improvement. We’re still working on it. That they were lazy, that they didn’t meet expectations, were unprepared, and compared to a high performing [Lone Lake] kid. Those are the types of kids that AVID kids were being compared to. These are kids that are getting into Berkeley and Stanford, which is great. There are some kids that are just very high performing, you know perfect on the SAT, etc.

Manuel explained that the negative perception of AVID was driven in part by content teachers’ perception of AVID students as failing:

Manuel: I think that had a lot to do with the perception.

SV: Right. So then AVID gets branded with their perceived failure of the kids?

Manuel: Exactly

SV: So why did they think AVID wasn’t successful or why the kids weren’t successful?

Manuel: I don’t think they ever think about that.

SV: They didn’t get that far?

Manuel: Don’t get that far. It’s easier to point blame and just say they’re underperforming versus really asking that question why. And that’s what we’re trying to do—if we’re underperforming, and what that means. And that’s different to every teacher.

In examining the goals of AVID, the negative perception of AVID students as underperforming drove somewhat how AVID teachers made decisions about which students would be targeted for the program:

Manuel: Well I think the number one thing that drove [the change] was in order to change perception—performance. Kids have to perform. So we started in the classroom. It’s easy to get overwhelmed with perception but even though that was always a goal of changing it, it was always in the back burner, because we realized, and we came to the agreement that the changes that we make in the classroom will propel the shift in perception.

Within AVID, there was some support among AVID teachers for the outside perception of AVID students as underperforming relative to the broader school population:
Heather: Because what we were finding is we would recruit these kids 9th grade, and we would lose half of them to the SPED program.

SV: Why SPED (special education)?

Heather: They were kids with serious learning disabilities, but it had just gone unidentified until we're like looking at their work on a weekly basis, an we're like, "Hey, you're working your butt off and the light's still not going on, so you need more help than we're giving." And so, we're going through all the data, and then we're recruiting them, and then our SPED team is like, "Here come the AVID people!" And then we were also finding, too, that they didn't have the sense of determination. Because they were just like, "I'm Mexican, so I'm here." So, ok, that's not a good recruitment point. That's not the goal of our program.

In addition, teachers perceived a motivation gap between students within the AVID program that teachers saw as creating tension within the AVID elective classes:

Heather: Before we made the shift to redefine AVID we were experiencing two different kinds of kids in AVID that had two really disparate needs. We had the AVID kid, and then we had the AVID kid who had basically a bad work ethic and wasn't doing homework, wasn't showing up to school and their needs were just so much greater in terms of their extenuating circumstances. There's like language deficiencies, work habit deficiencies, drug abuse, that we had to decide what shift are we going to make because we as a program—and at that time there were two of us teaching it—just couldn't meet both of those needs effectively. And then also those two groups of students, when you put them in the same classroom, look at each other like, “You’re bringing me down.” “Oh yeah? Well you’re hating on me.” It was really hard to build that AVID family.

SV: There was tension, it sounds like.

Heather: There was lots of tension yeah.

Noting numerous “deficiencies” among some AVID students, along with external factors like budget cuts and Common Core curricular changes, and school-based factors like a negative perception of AVID students as low-performing, the AVID team set out to redefine the program by altering the AVID mission and the ideal AVID student.
Redefining AVID

In changing the recruitment goals for AVID, the Lone Lake HS AVID team began with looking at the school’s culture of college-going, one that is highly competitive and selective, a factor that they viewed as contributing to their approach to re-branding the program:

Heather: One thing about the college-going culture here that might make us a little bit different than some of the other schools is, so there's a high college-going culture here, but there's this idea that if you're not getting into Stanford or Berkeley, any other college is worthless. So we've had to take the opposite tack of building a college-going culture—[instead], it's calming a college-going culture down. [A local Cal State school] may be a great option for some students, especially for kids in the middle. Don't give up and assume you're going to a JC. There's a lot of options between a JC and Stanford.

Teachers also examined the mission of AVID generally and the mission at Lone Lake HS specifically. Teachers recognized that a strong college-going culture at the school meant that many students on campus arrived at school with some knowledge about college, owing to their parents’ education, but there were other “gaps” that arose:

Heather: A lot of times, kids at Lone Lake, because we have such a college-going culture, and we have a very well-educated community, they already know the pipeline to college. Half the time they're a legacy somewhere. So kids in AVID most of the time have a parent that has "some college," that's our big population. Or they have a parent that has a college education, but it was India or Korea, and so they're like "I have no idea how to help you here." And sometimes it's, they're the invisible poverty situation. Yeah, dad's got a master's in engineering, but he got fired. Mom's not around, and dad's working two jobs. So, sure, technically dad could help him. He's been through the American system, but the reality of that.

Instead of being the first in their families to go to college or coming from low-income or underrepresented groups, the AVID students at Lone Lake HS had other, less well-defined needs:
Heather: After looking at the data, we realized, ok, parent education is a big piece where we differ, so that we might focus there. Other than that, it's the extenuating circumstances that really drive the kid in the AVID program. Otherwise they look exactly the same as the other Lone Lake students on paper in terms of GPA, demographics, all those quantifiable pieces. So we realized, "Ok, we have to speak to kids that have an extenuating circumstance gap." So we came up with these descriptors that have verbs with them. And realized, ok want a kid maybe doesn't have this in their home life, or is missing this at home, or is—so, like in every grade level, sometimes two or three in a class we've got kids with a parent that's deceased, or a kid that's struggling with a disease, and is likely to be deceased pretty soon. Or, we've got kids that are in an awful home situation where there's like major mental illness going on. Things like that that don't show up.

Given that a number of Hispanic and Latino and low-income students—those historically targeted by the AVID program—also have “extenuating circumstances” that affect their access to college, it appears that the teachers distinguished between those students, and students at Lone Lake who were similar to the broader Lone Lake population but who had an “extenuating circumstance” gap as compared to the “typical” Lone Lake student.

Manuel explained that teachers also took into account the Lone Lake mission statement when considering how to define the Lone Lake AVID student:

Manuel: So literally we started with a mission statement that is specific to Lone Lake that really aligns with Lone Lake’s mission.

Indeed, the Lone Lake mission focuses on such values as high academic and personal standards and a school culture that emphasizes respect for the community and the uniqueness of the individual. The mission does not mention equity, but does mention that students should have respect for diverse perspectives. Using the school’s mission as a starting point, the teachers developed a three-pronged AVID mission:

Manuel: So number one preparing students for rigorous course work—skills, you know academic skills; reading, writing, WICR. Number two was increasing college awareness. We realized that a lot of our kids just wanted the college information, the stuff, what is the SAT and blah, blah, blah—,
you know the applications and all the financial aid and all that stuff. And number three, and it's the third prong of our mission statement, is building community. We realized that. And it really started by looking at our kids and we realized that a lot of the kids just wanted a place to be, a sense of home. So that mission statement, everything that we do, really is focused around those three ideas.

Focusing on AVID's mission of recruiting students “in the academic middle” with an “extenuating circumstances gap,” the teachers at Lone Lake HS modified their recruitment to match the “middle” students at Lone Lake HS:

Heather: We knew that Lone Lake didn't fit into the AVID school. So we were like, "Who's the kid in the middle at Lone Lake?" So, we looked at a ton of data, and this was a couple of years ago, and we came up with a "Defining the AVID Student at Lone Lake" document. But it shows AVID student, Lone Lake student. Because we looked at all this data…So we just wanted to do some simple comparisons. And we are pretty aligned with where the school is. And the biggest piece for us was the parent education. So our kids had less college graduate and graduate school. And we had significantly more "some college." And so, we can't focus on demographics to recruit.

Table 9 outlines some of the criteria that teachers now use when speaking to parents, counselors and other content teachers about how to determine whether AVID is right for their students. While coming from a lower income family or being a first-generation college student at the four-year level make an appearance on the list of criteria, they are two of many “characteristics” that students could have that would make them fit into the Lone Lake HS AVID mission. Further, “determination” for success and a “desire” for information about college become criteria potential AVID students should mostly meet, as AVID functions as a program that largely supports the existing college-going culture, rather than as a lever that creates such a culture:

Manuel: You know a lot of our parents went to college. It’s just expected. So you know for AVID specifically it’s been how can we support the college-going culture versus create it? I’ve been on other sites where the goal is to create the college-going culture. Here it’s to support it.
Table 9. Characteristics Defining the Potential AVID Student at Lone Lake High School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Potential AVID Student Is…</th>
<th>The Potential AVID Student Is Not…</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academically</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determined to succeed but struggling with obstacles outside of school.</td>
<td>A student demonstrating a specific learning challenge or need for learning strategies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interested in pursuing more rigorous courses and demonstrate potential if supported.</td>
<td>Purposefully lazy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desires direct instruction on high school graduation and college entrance requirements, along with college major and career planning.</td>
<td>Reactive or unwilling to grow or accept feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socially</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wants a place to connect socially and emotionally with other students and adults.</td>
<td>Unable to interact with peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaotic family life that may impact their academic performance.</td>
<td>A strong negative influence on others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First in their family to attend a four-year college.</td>
<td>Strongly apathetic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates greater financial need than the average Lone Lake student.</td>
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*Note. The information in this chart comes from a handout that Lone Lake HS AVID teachers created for the purpose of recruiting potential AVID students. This is a partial list of characteristics students should have in order to be considered for AVID.*

The Achievement Gap Redefined

Missing from the redefined AVID student criteria is anything about race or ethnicity. In deciding to focus on the “extenuating circumstances gap” when recruiting students, AVID teachers at Lone Lake HS removed the goal of narrowing the achievement gap from their own site’s AVID mission, in part because teachers did not
see Lone Lake HS’s students fitting the traditional AVID demographic, and in part because Lone Lake HS’s mission did not include narrowing the achievement gap:

Heather: [Our mission statement] is ripped from AVID’s general mission statement. But we reworked it for Lone Lake demographic, so like closing the achievement gap isn't necessarily part of our mission, just because the populations are so different.

In redefining the ideal AVID student at Lone Lake HS, teachers recognized that an achievement gap did exist at the school, but that the number of students affected by that gap was “small”:

Heather: So the achievement gap is usually referencing poverty and race. Those subgroups exist at Lone Lake HS and the achievement gap does exist at Lone Lake HS. Those subgroups are just incredibly small. After the recession the kids qualifying for Free and Reduced lunch, that percentage went up. We’re somewhere like 14% right now, which we used to be at like 7%. So that was big—and we’re hovering still around 14%. So that was a big shift.

The administration and the AVID teachers recognized that changing the definition of AVID to focus on extenuating circumstances wouldn’t do much to address the achievement gap at Lone Lake HS, a gap that became evident when examining students’ grades:

Heather: So at the same time [as the budget cuts] Lone Lake was noticing our D and F rate go up and then you look at the subgroups of those Ds and Fs and it's like, “Oh, hum, the achievement gap.” So there was a lot of talk with administration, and AVID was part of that, of how do we address this? We were telling them look this is all the cool stuff that we’ve built in to help kids do better, but it's dependent on kids coming in with determination. That’s in our name to do well and you’re asking us to address kids that are determined not to do well. Some of the kids were fighting doing homework and you can’t even, even when you give them space and time they’re not doing it, and we kept exiting those kids. We’re like, “We either need to completely revamp our program and meet these kids’ needs and then these other kids in the middle need to be addressed somewhere else or vice versa.”
Teachers surmised that either AVID could change to fit the needs of the students who were struggling academically and who were already enrolled in AVID, or they could address the needs of those students in another way outside of AVID. They chose the latter, recognizing that by excluding underrepresented students from the AVID recruitment mission would do little to narrow the achievement gap. Instead, the school created a new class designed for such students who were struggling in school but who did not meet the new AVID criteria:

Heather: I think the thing to add context to is as we narrow this focus for the kid in the middle at Lone Lake, we were ignoring some other populations...some demographic populations that also suffer from poverty, this other range of issues, but they weren't determined to go to college, and they were not interested in taking notes to try to go to college. So it's like our admin was like, "We still have this group." And we're like, "Hey, you can't push them into AVID because they're just going to fail, and it's not going to be a good scene." So they created an academic success class, which is kind of like AVID-basic. So they're not buying into a four-year program that's pushing college. But it's a place where they get a little bit of strategies, AVID strategies a lot of them. In fact the teacher that used to teach AVID teaches the academic success class, has them organized into groups where they can work together, but it's not an actual tutorial, so it's like AVID-lite. And the kids are placed in there on a term-by-term basis. So some kids just had a rough semester, and they just need to get back on their feet. Academic success is the right place for them. They're like, "Hmm, it's cool. I'm going to go to trade school. It's for me." And that's great. Academic Success helped fill that gap.

In essence, the new Academic Success class has taken up the mantle of narrowing the achievement gap when it comes to students’ grades, but not necessarily when it comes to providing access to college, despite the fact that the latter features prominently in the AVID mission. The Academic Success program has some of the same technical features of AVID, like grade checks and AVID tutors, but the focus is less on college and more on providing support in students’ content classes:
Heather: So it’s kind of like “AVID-lite” is what it is. There’s a lot of time for kids to complete tasks, but they go to [a local university] for a college fieldtrip, they do the same grade checks that we do, they have the same [advisory] forum to make sure that they go talk to their teachers. It’s like the basic stuff of AVID but it’s more about how can we support you so that you can get your work done and you’ve got a foothold into a class. So that’s how that kind of got divided up.

Bringing the school’s AVID mission in line with the Lone Lake school mission yielded positive results when it came to how AVID was perceived on campus once the staff learned of the new direction the program was taking.

Getting The Word Out

The new portrait of an AVID student at Lone Lake HS that emerged from the redefinition looked a lot like a “typical” Lone Lake HS student:

SV: So then given that description how is that typical AVID student different from a typical Lone Lake student who is not in AVID?

Heather: There’s really not.

SV: There’s a lot of overlap?

Heather: Yeah the outstanding thing is the extenuating circumstances.

What emerged, then, was a new challenge of getting the word out to the community about the program’s new focus, especially since the new criteria were more complex than just focusing on race or income:

Heather: So, and then we've faced the recruitment challenge of how do you find those kids? So we took a look at, that's where some of our parent night things became really important. So we wanted to communicate who the AVID student is, so we made a ton of these videos that featured different types of kids with different kinds of goals. And then we even straight out said, "Here's our target student—does your kid fit this?"

By providing examples to parents of the ideal or typical AVID student, teachers saw enrollment increase as parents came to understand the goals of the program:
Heather: What we experienced is some parents came to these parent meetings and were like, "That's not my kid. He's not motivated. Shoot, I should go in a different direction." And we're like, "Ok." Or they would look at this and say, "Wow, that is my kid. But he has no idea how to access college for example." So that was really helpful to be able to clearly say, "This is the kind of kid that's right for AVID," and that really helped our recruitment. Now we've got this strong culture of kids that are motivated and can support each other, because, "Hey, I recognize what you're going through."

Teachers had narrowed the “motivation gap” they had identified by making “motivation” a prerequisite for joining the program. And as parents and community members better understood the new focus of AVID at Lone Lake HS, the reputation of the program on campus also improved, in part because teachers, parents and administrators better understood what AVID provides students who are highly motivated but in need of extra support:

Heather: But defining the program, defining the student has really helped us when we need to communicate with those teachers and say, “Hey so and so, this is his first AP, here’s some context for the kid,” so that teachers are prepped for that challenge with that kid and understand what we’re doing in AVID to help him. So they know, “Oh he’s got tutorial, he’s got a college tutor, he’s got somebody who is looking at his grades every week.”

SV: It’s not all on me.

Heather: Yeah, and so that they know that they can email us and be like, “So and so failed his test,” or whatever it is. And because we can kind of approach it that way that has helped.

As a result, support for AVID improved as the program’s goals came more in line with those of the school generally:

SV: Do you feel supported here?

Heather: Yes. I don’t know that I could have always said that, but I feel supported now. I’ve got a fantastic team that I feel supported by. Our principal gets AVID now and so he’s very supportive. Our district is supportive of AVID.
SV: What changed? What was it before that was making you feel a little less so?

Heather: Us being able to define who we are and who we serve and what we do. And the more we can communicate that to the people we needed support from the more they go, “Oh,” and then they’re able to kind of naturally fill in, “Here’s where I see my role helping what you’re doing because what you’re doing is a good thing.” So that redefinition really helped.

Heather’s comment that administrators believes what AVID is doing “is a good thing” underscores the relationship between AVID’s goals and those of the school. When missions align, as they appear to at Lone Lake HS, teachers find it easier to get what they need, as political tensions are eased in favor of a shared mission and vision for supporting students. This dynamic is not dissimilar to the dynamic at Hope High School, where the school’s mission for “hope and opportunity” for aligns with AVID’s mission of narrowing the achievement gap and preparing all students for college. The difference, and it is a major one, is that at Hope HS, the focus on equity remains intact, whereas at Lone Lake, it has been set aside.

Summary

This section examined how teachers at three school sites responded to the negative perception of AVID on their respective campuses—by considering a “re-branding” of AVID that looked closely at the AVID target demographic. Lone Lake HS emerged as an example of a school that had undergone such a “re-branding” effort over a period of five years, an effort that had implications for the program’s reputation and for the students both formerly and currently recruited by the program.

Conclusion

This chapter explored two primary findings. First, from teachers’ perspectives, the degree of perceived campus-wide support for AVID stems in part from the relationship
between schoolwide and AVID demographics. Schools fell into one of three broad categories in terms of AVID support: schoolwide support, mostly marginalized, and supported but isolated. The second finding indicated that teachers respond to the degree of perceived campus-wide support for AVID by reconsidering the definition of an AVID student. After an exploration of a third finding in Chapter 6, the discussion in Chapter 7 will examine implications for enacting the critical conditions for equity and diversity in college access (Oakes et al., 2004) that arise from all findings in the study.
CHAPTER 6: TEACHERS RESPOND STRATEGICALLY TO INSTITUTIONAL CONSTRAINTS

Introduction

Chapter 5 examined how one school context factor—the relationship between schoolwide and AVID demographics—influenced the perception of AVID on campus and teachers’ definition of an AVID student. This chapter examines a variety of other school context factors that relate to how teachers enact the critical conditions of access to a culture of college-going and institutional supports in their interactions with students, yielding the following finding:

AVID teachers across contexts recognize and respond to institutional constraints in strategic ways, both in marshaling support for the program and in their everyday interactions with students.

In understanding how teachers make decisions when implementing a reform, this study uses AVID as an example of a reform in use, looking at teachers’ decisions in context through the lens of Oakes’ (1992) framework for multiple dimensions of reform. In describing that framework, Hubbard et al. (2006) note that technical approaches to reform seek to add to or modify available resources, including purchasing computers, changing the master schedule and sending teachers to professional development. Cultural approaches to school reform “engage educators’ values, beliefs, and norms, often on controversial topics such as the placement of teachers and the nature of intelligence and its distribution across race, ethnicity, class, and gender” (p. 12). Finally, political approaches include “galvaniz[ing] important political constituencies” and building relationships within and across agencies (p. 12). Hubbard et al. argue that “the reform process benefits from balanced attention to all three dimensions” (2006, p. 14). Table 10 provides a brief summary of the key ideas regarding the three dimensions of reform,
along with specific examples of the types of constraints and supports that teachers in this study identified in each of the domains.

Table 10. Key Ideas and Examples of Technical, Political, and Cultural Constraints and Supports

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Key Ideas</th>
<th>Constraint Examples</th>
<th>Support Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical</td>
<td>“Means of distributing school resources” (Oakes, 2002, p. 18). Changes in school organization, curriculum, teaching, etc. (Oakes, 2002).</td>
<td>• Large class sizes</td>
<td>• Lunches for site team meetings</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Few tutors</td>
<td>• Funding for field trips</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Limited funding</td>
<td>• Planners for students</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Limited time for collaboration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Involves “granting of permission, taking of risks, redistributing power, forming coalitions” (Oakes, 2002, p. 19). “Struggle among individuals and groups for comparative advantage in the distribution of school resources, opportunities, and credentials that have exchange value in the larger society” and includes “highly charged issues of race and social class stratification” (Oakes, 2002, p. 13).</td>
<td>• Content teachers resistant to modifying instruction to support AVID students</td>
<td>• Strong AVID Site Team with support from parents, teachers, and administrators</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Gatekeeping school employees who limit access to key resources</td>
<td>• Principal who publicly supports AVID program</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Unsupportive or disengaged administrators at site or district</td>
<td>• Counseling support for AVID</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Strong district-level support for AVID (assigned personnel, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>Reforms have a “web of cultural assumptions about what is true—what is ‘normal’—and cultural values about what constitutes appropriate action given particular ‘truths’” (Oakes, 2002, p. 12). “Norms” guide decision making (Oakes, 2002). Reforms must engage educators’ values, beliefs and norms (Hubbard et al., 2006).</td>
<td>• Limited parent support for or understanding of college</td>
<td>• Strong college-going school culture by virtue of large number of students with parents who went to college</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• High pressure college-going culture</td>
<td>• Parent support with fundraising</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Assumptions about AVID students as unmotivated or lacking desire for college</td>
<td>• Schoolwide pride from high AVID success</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Note:* The examples of “constraints” and “supports” listed in this table came from interviews with teachers across settings.
What I found when speaking with teachers in all settings was that rarely do constraints and supports arise in a vacuum, an observation that was not surprising given the research on school reform. For example, the technical issue of how administrators allocate courses within the master schedule gives rise to highly political considerations and reflects deeply-held beliefs and site-based norms about what factors should influence course allocation. Further, teachers reported their concerns that technical constraints like limited collaboration time, lack of tutors, and few financial resources were not benign, sometimes having an immediate and dramatic effect on a student’s ability to access critical resources.

In essence, I found time and again that all three dimensions often combine to create what I will call “institutional constraints and supports” that affect teachers’ enactment of the critical conditions. It is teachers’ strategic actions that emerged as a noteworthy pattern in how they enacted the critical conditions across settings in cultivating support for AVID generally and in acting on behalf of students in everyday situations. This chapter focuses on teachers’ decision-making in response to some of those site-based institutional constraints, all of which have technical, political, and cultural dimensions.

**Institutional Constraint: The Master Schedule**

In Chapter 5, I summarized teachers’ concerns that AVID was undervalued at their school sites. In my interviews with them, teachers described the master schedule process as one source of frustration. A school’s master schedule includes the entire list of courses, including teacher and room assignments, and both reflects and drives a school’s priorities. Developing the master schedule involves allocating scarce resources, and as a
result becomes a highly political process that involves negotiation, compromise, and difficult conversations. How a master schedule comes together can have implications for students, especially those who either struggle academically or who have other constraints on their time. AVID students, for example, must enroll in the AVID elective all four years, a requirement that limits their opportunity to take other electives and makes it harder for them to make up courses if they need remediation. The technical constraints created by the master schedule process, then, force teachers to contend with the political challenges of advocating for students within a school culture that does not always prioritize the needs of AVID students. An example of how this process manifested at one school site is the struggle at Hidden Crest HS over moving AVID from 0 period to the regular school day.

At Hidden Crest HS, AVID’s place in the master schedule has both reflected and influenced the feeling on the part of AVID teachers that AVID is “hidden” and of low priority. With the exception of the two freshman courses, all other AVID elective classes are held during 0 period, before the school day and very early in the morning (before 7:00 a.m.). This scheduling choice has created a gatekeeping obstacle for students who cannot accommodate the early start time into their schedules:

Chris: So the complication [is that] transportation has been an issue. Had to drop some AVID students just because they couldn't get here. It starts at 6:50 a.m. It is pretty early. You know some if it's dedication—do you really want to be here. But some [it is] they really can't get here.

Teachers at Hidden Crest HS have responded by working with individual students in their efforts to get to class on time—at least, with the students who ultimately were able to enroll in the class. But such one-on-one efforts are not always successful. Chris tried to
work with the school to help one of his students, who did not have a ride to school that early in the morning, obtain a bus pass so he could get to school for AVID:

Chris: You know I have a student that has a hard time getting here depending on what's happening with his family. And he doesn't live far enough to qualify for a bus pass, or something like that. Like I tried to get him a bus pass through the administration, and they said he doesn't live far enough in the zoning laws or something like that. So, they couldn't give him a bus pass. I think it's a city bus pass...to get him here. And, they just said it wasn't, they couldn't make it happen.

In this case, Chris’ strategic thinking—looking for a way to accommodate his student's transportation needs, a need that arose out of a technical constraint in the master schedule—wasn’t sufficient to overcome the lack of political support to get his student what he needed. Chris was frustrated by the school’s response, but has still found ways to address students’ needs, even if he doesn't understand why the constraint is in place:

Chris: So that was frustrating because he wants to get here, and he's found ways to get here. But I have students, I try to open a line of communication so they e-mail me if they're going to be late, if they can't make it, just to work on those communication skills.

In short, offering AVID during 0 period almost exclusively has created an obstacle to a program designed to reduce obstacles to college for underrepresented and underserved students:

Chris: It’s tough because if we had AVID offered throughout the day for the other classes, sophomore, junior and senior, it would add more choices.

SV: Why don't they?

Chris: I don't have the answer to that. We're trying to. It's something we talk about in our meetings for next year because it's really become a problem. We've had to let some students go simply because they can't make it here, and they definitely qualify and deserve to be in AVID.

In my conversations with other AVID teachers at the same site, the problem of AVID at 0 period arose repeatedly. When I met with Sean (the AVID Coordinator) for
our first interview, he put his request for a change in the master schedule in political context, noting that AVID is in essence in competition with other programs for resources:

Sean: We talked about this at the meeting the other day, just more resources and of course everybody wants more money for their programs and stuff.

Sean described the argument he made to administrators, noting that students would be lost from the class if the master schedule were not adjusted to add more classes during the school day:

SV: So when making the argument to them, what kinds of things did you say?

Sean: [I said], "We have kids that we're losing. We have good quality kids and they need the help but they just can't, like I told you, they just can't get here, they don't want to get here, we shouldn't make them come to 0 period if they can't, or whatever it is, so, we need, if kids only sign up for 0 period then you're right, we don't need that during the day. But if we have like 20 kids at least we need to go ahead and do that, open up a section. I know you don't want a class of 12 or 15 and we understand you can't do that, but if we can get the numbers let's do it."

Sean’s approach recognized that “numbers” drive the master schedule. In other words, from administrators’ perspectives, enough students need to express interest in a course in order for the school to offer it. But even after framing the issue using terms familiar to administrators, Sean seemed skeptical that administrators were taking his request seriously:

SV: How did they respond?

Sean: I mean like they, quote unquote, "Yeah, we're going to see what we can do, we'll look at the numbers," you know, like they usually do. So, we will see. I asked about it yesterday, and they were like, "Oh, that was a topic, I'm not sure," so I'm going to follow up on Monday to see how that's going.
When I followed up with Sean several weeks later, however, he had found a way to advocate for a policy shift that recognized administrators’ concerns about “numbers” and that made it difficult for administrators to say no:

Sean: I truthfully went in with a list of kids with student ID numbers, and I said “We’re going to have 37 kids that will leave if we don’t get it during the day.” You know maybe some of them would have [gone] to zero [period], but I went in and said, “Hey, it’s a program you want to build. You say you want it here at the school. We’re going to lose kids, 6 or 7 kids in each class. Here, here are the numbers. You can look at it, you can talk to them.”

Rather than just provide the number of students who would drop AVID if it wasn’t offered during the school day, which he had already tried, Sean went a step further:

Sean: I went to every class individually, talked to the students, “Hey,” you know, who liked it during the day, try and get this option for the day. “Who wants zero? I need your name. I need your student ID number.” I collected them all and went to the counselors, went to the AP and then I actually went to the principal and just let her know.

When the administrators offered another potential obstacle, Sean had a solution ready:

Sean: So you know they asked, “Who do we have teaching it?” I had a suggestion of a teacher that can teach the class.

Sean had come prepared not only with the number of students who would be affected, but with the names and ID numbers of the potentially affected students. He had also already thought of a potential teacher for the new class during the school day, something he anticipated the administration would ask. Such strategic thinking led to a change in the policy, for as Sean explained, “if they see the numbers, there’s nothing they can say”:

SV: So then what was the principal’s response when you showed her the numbers?

Sean: I mean she was very supportive. She’s just a supportive principal. I mean she was an AP here before and she supported the AVID program and she was like, “Ok wow,” she was like, “Well, do your job, so let’s go ahead and work on it.” So she did.
Sean’s comment on his supportive principal underscores how important administrative support is to a program like AVID. At Hidden Crest HS, AVID had been at 0 period for many years, but it wasn’t until Sean felt the principal would be likely to support his request that he felt comfortable pushing it as strongly as he did, and even then he came to the interaction armed with data and solutions to potential concerns.

**Institutional Constraint: Access to Rigorous Coursework**

One of the critical conditions for equity in access to college that the Oakes et al. (2004) framework describes is access to rigorous coursework. Making sure such courses are offered is the primary intention behind that critical condition, and indeed all of the schools in this study provide a variety of Advanced Placement and other advanced and rigorous courses to choose from. However, ensuring that students within each school have equitable access to those rigorous classes requires institutional support, a critical condition that is a focus of this study. In speaking with AVID teachers, it became clear that ensuring equitable access to rigor arose as an instructional constraint time and again, especially in schools that have a strong culture of college-going and high achievement combined with fewer underrepresented students. Heather, who works at Lone Lake HS, described the situation at her school, one that has a high degree of support for AVID:

Heather: A sticking point we're working on is the kid in the middle's access to AP courses. So, a lot of kids are taking their first AP sophomore or junior year. And in some courses it's a nice progression, there's lots of scaffolding going on. It's definitely harder, the work ethic has to be there, but there's scaffolded instruction so the kids have a foothold. And then we can support them in, "I know you're going to get 30 pages a night, so how can we do this?" And the teacher's said, "Here's how I want you to approach the reading, here's how it looks on the assessment," and the kids can grab onto that. I can grab onto that as well, and the tutors can go, "Oh, I see," and help kids through that. So, AP Bio has been great for that. There's several AP classes.
But not all content teachers at Lone Lake HS are open to modifying instruction or providing support for students who do not arrive in the course with the requisite skills and background:

Heather: On the other hand, there are other courses that give them no foothold and the teacher's approach is, "You should know this, you should be able to do this, and if you can't, get out." And so that's been a struggle when teachers have that attitude with a 16-year-old kid. Like, "Your job is to teach, not to scare."

AVID teachers respond to this constraint in a variety of ways. In cases where students express interest in taking classes with teachers who have voiced the “do it or get out” message, Heather works with the students to first make sure their choices are realistic:

Heather: I try to keep it based in reality. I wish I could waive my magic wand and make scaffolding appear for them. Sometimes the kid is making a bad choice. They're taking AP Physics because their mom said they should. But they don't like science and they haven't finished Algebra 3/4. It's like, "You're setting yourself up here." So sometimes that's the conversation. "What are your real interests? What is a direction we can go that's going to be challenging but that fits you." And most kids are open to hearing that conversation.

Heather’s interest is in making sure the student is taking the right course for that student, and that the student is willing to take on the extra work that comes from enrolling in a class with a less supportive teacher:

Heather: Sometimes they're taking a course that is appropriate for their interest and is appropriate for where they're at academically, but, and I've had a kid tell me, "I got in there and I'm the only Filipino kid, and there's a lot of very serious Chinese people in there. And the teacher just told us, 'If you can't do this assignment, get out.'" And they're just like, "Ah!" And so there's no friend set, there's no social support. Because teachers want kids that can teach themselves? To some level? Because they're so academically invested in the content. So for those kids, which is sometimes the case, I tell them, "How bad do you want this?"

Sometimes, students opt out:
Heather: And sometimes the answer is, I can't, it's too much work." And so they go a different direction. And that sucks. That's a really awful conversation to have.

But sometimes students move forward. When students opt to take a difficult course knowing they may have little support from the classroom teacher, Heather helps the students strategize:

Heather: If you want it this bad, here's the reality you're going to have to face. You're going to have to make friends. Find a way to make friends. Get a study group going. Here's two other kids in AVID taking that course in a different period. Let's get a tutor. How bad do you want this, because you're going to have to work. It's going to be an uphill battle. But the D in AVID stands for Determination.

Another way of addressing the constraint imposed by gate-keeping content teachers is to avoid having students enroll in classes with such teachers altogether, instead steering students toward courses where teachers are more likely to provide scaffolding and other support. In a high-achieving, competitive environment, signing up for AP classes can be nerve-wracking for students who fear any kind of failure, especially when parents also echo that fear, a dynamic that emerged with one of Heather’s students:

Heather: I have one girl who wanted to take an AP but who was very, very nervous about it. She generally did not deal well with failure or struggling in classes in general, and so she was very, very nervous to take an AP which she thought was a little bit above her potential. But she trusted me and signed up for it, and her mom fought me tooth and nail on signing up for an AP. I went through the research with her, I told her how powerful this was, and I knew honestly that if the student was willing to work hard she was capable of this AP, and the student was a hard worker. So, mom finally said, "Ok, fine. Take the AP."

Even though the student struggled her first semester, she persisted, with support from AVID:

Heather: So she stayed in the AP class and again, and kept up with the AVID support in terms of revising her tutorial and that kind of thing, and ended up with a B by the end of third quarter, which is halfway through
the second term of her AP class. Through sheer hard work and determination, and using the AVID strategies.

In explaining her rationale for placing this nervous student with this particular teacher, Heather noted the importance of knowing how the AP teacher works. In essence, the AVID teachers use their institutional knowledge to help steer students toward a path where they will most likely receive the support they need, while still holding the high standard of requiring students to take rigorous classes:

Heather: One of the realizations that we came to as a program was that the attitude and the social support of the AP teacher makes a huge difference for the kid that's trying an AP for the first time or maybe doesn't have a social group of friends that are taking AP classes. Because this particular teacher was welcoming, offered support for the student, both in class and outside of class, and the student got the impression that they belonged there and that if they were really work hard the teachers were willing to work with them, it ended up in success.

In facilitating access to rigor despite institutional obstacles, Heather does have some factors acting in her favor. She has been a teacher at Lone Lake HS for many years and has taught AVID there for over ten years. This has allowed her time to learn the culture of the school and its political climate thoroughly, knowledge she puts to use when implementing changes to AVID and when supporting individual students. The work Heather has done with her AVID team to learn about the campus and create a network of support has helped foster strong support for AVID on campus, another factor that makes it easier for her to seek and find support for her students. A feedback loop develops—strong support for AVID facilitates support for AVID students, which strengthens support for the program as students achieve success (Figure 10).
However, not all AVID teachers have the same factors acting in their favor. Both Humera and Katie at Hidden Brook HS, for example, are relatively new to AVID and to the high school setting. As such, they lack the same degree of institutional knowledge that Heather has had years to cultivate. Further, AVID does not enjoy the same support on campus as it does at Lone Lake HS. These factors do affect students’ access to rigor. For example, Katie has learned that many of her AVID students did not receive proper academic counseling early in their time at Hidden Brook HS, even from Katie herself, which has allowed problems with some students’ schedules to go unnoticed until recently:

Katie: I feel like honestly I think in their scheduling some of these kids were just, they weren’t scheduled right as [freshmen]. I had one of my kids who was in Chinese. It’s like, “Why did you fail Chinese when you should be in Spanish 3?” So little things like that that were missed by counseling or the first AVID teacher and then me.

Humera, in her first year at the high school and as an AVID teacher echoed a similar concern, feeling overwhelmed with how much weight she was expected to carry when managing students’ schedules and four-year plans:
Humera: They're asking my opinion on so many different things and it's just a lot more involved than I thought I would be as far as these kids' four-year plans for high school. I'm being asked, "Should I take this? Should I take that? Should I wait to take this," and like today I mean it was just kid after kid asking "When should I take Art—should I save it for senior year?" And just a lot of questions about their pathway in high school, and it's a lot more than I anticipated. As an AVID teacher you have to be really knowledgeable about all these courses and you have to feel comfortable giving them the right advice. And that is hard because a lot of times I just don't know.

As Humera expressed her frustration with not knowing the right path for students, Katie may have inadvertently passed on advice to one of her students that she may not have even realized was not as sound as it could have been, not because she didn’t care or have high expectations but because she simply didn’t have enough background:

Katie: And then some kids you know, I have got one girl that really wants to take AP Language. And she, eh, she's like a B student in regular English. And I'm just like, "I don't know if that's a jump for you." I also don't want them to push them just to take rigorous classes just to take them, and then not be successful, so for that one, "Hey, how about AP US History, or let's try a different AP class that we might have some success."

Since Katie has never taught AP English Language or AP History, has only been at a high school for two years, and is not that familiar with what the students are required to do in either class, she ended up discouraging a student who might have been adequately prepared for the rigors of AP English. The unknown can be scary for teachers and students alike. When teachers lack institutional knowledge and technical expertise in four-year planning, it could make it less likely they will encourage students to take more rigorous classes. In effect, teachers tasked with providing institutional support could end

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5 Having taught AP English Language for many years, I have some knowledge about the course, knowledge I have used to shed light on the implications of Katie's decision-making. A student earning a “B” in a college-prep English class who desires the rigor of AP Language is usually, in my experience, adequately prepared for the class. Further, the amount of reading required in AP US History can make it a more difficult jump for students than AP Language might, depending on the student’s skills and interests.
up acting as unintentional gatekeepers rather than as institutional agents facilitating access to rigor.

Lack of knowledge about courses aside, even when teachers take up the cause of helping a student access rigor in the face of institutional obstacles, the experience can be quite frustrating. Humera’s experience trying to help three of her freshman AVID students enroll in AP Spanish Language their sophomore year, a course typically only offered to juniors and seniors, provides a fitting example of what it looks like when institutional constraints block students’ access to rigor. The three students had strong backgrounds in Spanish as native speakers and wanted to take on the challenge of the AP Spanish Language class. But their Spanish 3 teacher told them to instead enroll in Spanish 4. A student guest speaker in AVID had previously reported that for native speakers, Spanish 4 was “a waste of time,” but the Spanish teacher was persistent in his insistence that the students not enroll in AP. So Humera reached out to the Spanish teacher, and to the rest of the Spanish department:

Humera: So I emailed the teacher. I emailed the whole Spanish department and I just asked. I’m like, “Can you please help me understand? Should they do Spanish 4 or not?” Because the department chair had told me no earlier and now this one, and my kids are kinda getting the run around. So I emailed them and I got some long emails back and [they said] “it’s a case by case.”

Recognizing that she wasn’t getting the answers she had hoped for, Humera returned to the students to continue the conversation:

Humera: But the bottom line is at this school it’s open access to AP classes. You don’t need teacher recommendation, so I went back to the kids and we talked. I said, “If you really feel you’re ready and I think you’re ready. I want you to do it.”
Then the Spanish department held a lunchtime meeting for students about AP, and the students returned to Humera concerned again, as they’d been given a form at the meeting that required their Spanish teacher’s signature:

Humera: They came back, they came right to me, the class hadn’t even started yet and they were like, “Look they gave us the summer assignment.” I’m like, “Ok great.” And they said, “They gave us this paper and said I have to sign” them, the teacher, the Spanish teacher, “I do or do not recommend so and so.”

The students were concerned that if their Spanish teacher didn’t believe they could do it—a belief he had expressed to at least some of them—then they couldn’t proceed. Humera reassured them that they could, in fact, take the course, no matter what the Spanish teacher said:

Humera: I said, “The bottom line is it doesn’t matter if they say ‘I do not recommend.’ You can still take it.”

Humera thought the situation was resolved, until another student approached her with the same form:

Humera: And then just today, like I thought we had resolved it and then today another boy came in, a different boy in the group of 3, with his little thing for the Spanish teacher, “I do or do not recommend,” and he’s like, “What if they circle ‘I do not recommend?’” I said, “It’s ok. You can still do it.” He had his AP contract [that said] that you have to sign with his parent understanding that you can’t drop it if it’s too hard.

The form not only required students to get their teacher’s permission, but also a parent’s permission. It also asked students to acknowledge that they would not be able to drop the class later (something that is not technically true—there is an add/drop period at the start of every course). To counter the messages students were receiving about their lack of potential for success in AP, a message that had one student “all shook,” Humera set up an activity for the students:
Humera: I had them do a practice AP Spanish Language test during a tutorial day. I said, “I think you can do it. Get their signature. Don’t worry about it. I’ll make sure you’re in the same AVID class next year. You can support each other through AP Spanish.” Then I set them up on the laptops on the practice AP Spanish test. I said, “Let’s try this and see. I want to see how comfortable you are.” I wasn’t with them but the tutor was and they said they got most of them right, so I told them, I said, “You guys, you can do it. I don’t want to push you in but…” Because one of them came back all shook—like “Oh no I can’t. He said no.” I said, “You’re fine. You are getting an A in Spanish 3. You did well on this practice test.”

Even after doing well on a practice exam and receiving support from their AVID teacher, the ordeal wasn’t over for these students. They next had to fill out the course request form for the counseling office as part of the standard spring enrollment process. When they went to choose AP Spanish, the course was not listed on the form:

Humera: They had got this course request form for next year. They got the 10th grade one. There was no option for AP Spanish. So they came to me and said, “We can’t mark AP Spanish.” So I emailed the counselor again. I said what do we do? He said, “Those will be the rare kids that we let into AP.” He said [that] they’ll actually do it online and online they can pick AP Spanish and they can handwrite it in. I said ok.

And when students went online to add AP Spanish? It wasn’t there either. Humera was frustrated:

Humera: I mean it still wasn’t on their freaking online form and they told me it would be a button online because it wasn’t on the hard copy. It still wasn’t on there for 10th graders. They had to call the registrar and she goes, “You’re not supposed to be taking it.” I’m like, “You’re the registrar, what do you know?” I’m like, “We already talked to teachers and we ended up getting approval from all the Spanish teachers for these three kids.”

The registrar asked the students to take a few additional steps to enroll in the class:

Humera: And [the registrar] said, “Ok well submit it online, put it on the hard copy, highlight it and personally give it to your counselor rather than putting it in the box.” I’m like, “You’re making my kids jump through these hoops.” And their counselor wasn’t even there the day that it was due so she wasn’t able to give it to him in person.
Humera’s exasperation at all the “hoops” her students were required to jump through just to enroll in one AP class was tempered only somewhat by the knowledge that her advocacy had made a difference for these select students:

Humera: I just kept thinking this whole time like if they weren’t in AVID this would have never happened. They wouldn’t have gone in to the class or they would have been bullied into not doing it until junior year.

In short, it should not be this difficult for students to access rigorous courses. This one incident (or long series of incidents related to one core problem) highlights the consequences for students when there is insufficient institutional support for rigor for all students. Further, even the most well-meaning, encouraging, and persistent AVID teacher cannot always adequately counter ingrained institutional constraints. Such persistence on the part of the AVID teacher is a necessary, but insufficient condition to ensure all students have equitable access to rigor, and thus to college.

**Institutional Constraint: A Highly-Competitive College-Going Culture**

At Lone Lake HS, the highly competitive culture, explored previously in relation to the institutional constraint of ensuring access to rigorous coursework, amounts to a related but distinct institutional constraint that affects not only individual students but also the AVID program generally. In this case, the competitive culture creates little incentive for content area teachers to adapt to the needs of diverse learners, since the school culture values individual effort and high achievement over inclusion and support. This is not to say there are not a number of teachers who routinely adapt to the needs of all of their students. But such a competitive school climate creates a cultural constraint to building political support for a program like AVID, a constraint that teachers at Lone Lake have made efforts to overcome.
As explored in Chapter 5, support for AVID at Lone Lake HS was not always present. Rather, teachers worked strategically over years to build political support as a means toward gaining technical resources to support the program. A key vehicle for change in how AVID is perceived on campus at Lone Lake HS has been the AVID site team. The site team ideally includes members from a variety of constituencies on campus: AVID teachers; content teachers across subject areas; administrators; counselors; tutors; and AVID parents and students. When Lone Lake HS began examining their AVID program looking for ways to “re-brand” and build political support on campus, they turned to the site team as a potential tool toward that effort:

Heather: We started with thinking about site team in terms of our goals to re-brand AVID to help people better understand who we are and what we do.

AVID teachers began the process of building a site team by strategically reaching out to teachers who would have the most interest in improving the program—those who had AVID students in their classes:

Heather: So we looked at data—who were our kids most frequently scheduled with. So we sent invitations, "Here's where we're meeting, we're having this food, here's why we're targeting you, please come." And we just started there.

The AVID team also recognized that they would be taking up teachers’ personal time, so they extended an important incentive to attend:

Heather: And we fed them lunch. And our admin has been very supportive—they give us food every single time. So, that was our original carrot.

In inviting teachers to participate, the AVID team extended the “carrot” of food, combined with the opportunity to participate in the problem-solving effort the AVID
team was undertaking. This created a small degree of buy-in that the AVID teachers built on over time.

Once teachers agreed to attend the site team meetings, the AVID teachers took into account how many teachers sometimes view the world in choosing how to approach the first few meetings:

Heather: So, teachers are very ego-driven, and I'm guilty of that, too. So we thought, "What is the best way we can approach this?" And we had a problem with re-branding. People just weren't understanding AVID, which is understandable. There's a lot to think about when it comes to AVID. So we took a problem-based approach and said [to teachers], "Here's our problem. People don't understand what we do, and who the AVID kid is, and what our expectations are."

In focusing on the students, rather than teaching strategies or curriculum, the AVID team avoided potentially sticky political friction that had contributed to the tension between AVID and content teachers in the past:

Heather: We didn't want to start with strategies or curriculum because that can get very personal. We started with, "Here's our problem. You help us." Our focus is always to keep it about the AVID students. "Here's what we're expecting from AVID kids. What are you seeing them do in their classes?" And they were great about talking about great stuff they're doing. "Here's stuff that they're not doing."

In site team meetings, the AVID teachers gained valuable insight into some of the stumbling blocks for getting support for their students:

Heather: One thing that came out of that original question was, "We don't know who our AVID kids are!" "Ok, how can we better communicate that?" A lot of times the only AVID kids that teachers knew were AVID kids were kids that were struggling or were somehow problematic because I e-mailed them and said, "Hey, so and so is failing your class." All the AVID kids that were so successful, they had no idea were AVID kids until something random happened. So that was the big problem. So, just by asking those kinds of questions, "Here's our problem. Here's what we're expecting. What are you guys seeing?" [It] created a lot of buy-in, and they were constantly getting something out of it as well in a safe way.
So, the AVID teachers found out, one possible source of frustration on the part of content teachers was that they only heard about their own AVID students when those students were struggling. This was a problem they could easily fix, one the site team would not have known about without having invited content teachers to participate in the site team process. Inviting content teachers to share concerns and insight in a “safe way” allowed the site team to build a climate of trust, which has opened up opportunities to discuss some of the more contentious issues:

Heather: Now we're at a point where we're actually talking about how we use Cornell notes. We’re all kind of like, "We get nervous before the meetings. Ok guys." So we're trying to just do a little at a time. We're just looking at the research, for example. But they're constantly asking for more. So, ok, we can address that next meeting. Great idea!

Cultivating a strong site team on campus has opened up other opportunities to help students directly, in addition to building support for the program generally, on the highly competitive campus. Heather describes a situation that arose with one of her AVID students. The student was struggling in her math class and attributed that frustration to the math teacher:

Heather: So, I have one student who took Geometry last term, and it was from a teacher that does math very old-school, so there tends to be a lot of self-teaching going on. So, because the class is primarily lecture for 45 mins, work on homework for 45 mins. So sage on stage, and then “take my info and apply it, work it out.” And she's a kid that has traditionally struggled in math, so she definitely needs more strategies than the direct approach. And she's also a kid that if she's not doing well, gets frustrated and it's everybody else's fault all of a sudden. "The teacher hates me. She's a terrible teacher. Nobody else is getting it. Everybody is failing." The litany.

In helping the student cope with her struggles, Heather sat down with her and had several discussions about taking ownership, recognizing where her own confusion stemmed from the teacher and when it did not, and working to have a more open attitude toward the
teacher and the class. But she didn’t stop there. Heather also invited the math teacher to come observe the tutorial process, partly as a way to introduce her to AVID, but also as a way to show her alternative teaching strategies in an unthreatening way:

Heather: I did reach out to the teacher, and I invited her to come watch tutorial. So I thought, "Maybe she just needs a refresher. Get out of her box a little bit." So, she came and watched tutorial and thought it was a great strategy. And I think she got a better sense of how kids are struggling.

That the teacher actually came to visit the AVID class speaks to the support AVID has on campus—and to Heather’s tenacity, since Heather procured coverage for the math teacher’s class so she could leave her students and come visit the AVID class. In addition, Heather also invited the teacher to the site team meetings. While she has yet to attend, creating that bridge by inviting her to visit the tutorial and to join the AVID site team helped Heather introduce potential solutions that would help her student:

Heather: We've invited her to site team. I let her know, the thing—she didn't come, but then I gave her a list of other AVID kids. “I know [Summer's] struggling, here's other AVID kids that are in some of your sections. So maybe you can partner them together.” So she actually did that. [Summer's] like, "She actually changed my seat, so now I'm next to so and so," so it's going better.

In this case, Heather’s intervention on behalf of the student led to a change in that student’s classroom experience, in essence, making it easier for her to access the rigorous content. The classroom teacher’s willingness to visit the AVID class and make adjustments to the class seating chart constitute important political support, something that takes time and long-term strategic thinking to develop on a school campus. AVID teachers who have figured out how to marshal this kind of political support have found ways to build support for their programs even on campuses that are less open to change.
Institutional Constraint: A Developing College-Going Culture

In contrast with the other three schools in the study, Hope HS has had the challenge of developing a schoolwide culture of college-going, as more of the students enrolled at the school and in the AVID program come from low-income families or will be the first in their families to go to college. So, rather than working within an existing culture of competition and achievement, teachers at Hope HS have worked over the years to help provide access to a culture of college-going for their AVID students. And their efforts have contributed to schoolwide change—Hope HS is among the higher performing schools in the region, with narrow achievement gaps between subgroups on standardized test scores. In working to ensure access to college for their students, the AVID team, site administrators, and other professionals have put in place a variety of institutional supports. Rather than viewing students’ challenges as deficits that cannot be helped, the teachers have found numerous ways to turn students’ challenges with poverty and lack of college-knowledge into opportunities. This section explores some of the supports teachers have put in place to mitigate the cultural constraints of poverty and limited access to a culture of college-going that some students encounter.

Understanding Students’ Circumstances: “They’re Used to Doing Without”

In describing their work with students, all of the AVID teachers at Hope HS echoed similar observations about their students—that students bring to school with them a variety of challenges that make achieving a college education an uphill battle for them, a battle that teachers believe they have an obligation to help students wage. Joy offered an example of a student who had given up registering for the SAT when he came across the questions about race and ethnicity and saw that the choices did not represent
his own identity. The form first asked students if they were “Hispanic,” (yes or no), and then when students moved on to the next section, there was no option for Hispanic or Latino at all. It confused the students, and so some gave up. Joy found out about their confusion when checking their registration status in class:

Joy: Because I gave my thousandth speech and then I start calling out their names. “[Eric], where is yours?” And he says, “Well I decided not to go.” “Like you decided not to go? That’s not a decision. You have to. To be in AVID you have to take the SAT or ACT test because [if not] then we don’t have a chance of getting you in college.”

First, Joy responded immediately by maintaining the high standard of mandatory SAT registration—for her, it was not an option for students to give up. Joy didn’t accuse the student of being irresponsible or lazy. Instead, she investigated the problem and addressed it with the rest of the class:

Joy: And he said, “Well I think it’s racist.” I’m like “Ok.” So I said, “Why do you think it’s racist?” Well, and then he showed me. It never affected me before because it didn’t really register. Then when we stopped over this I came back to the class and said, “Is anyone else having this problem?” And there were others who were confused and they said, “Oh, we just checked White or we just checked we don’t want to respond.”

I was curious about how Joy made sense of the student’s choice to give up registering for the SAT, even though she had told the class of its importance for “the thousandth time.” Joy explained her thinking by offering another story that drove home the point about the challenges students bring to school with them:

SV: When he said that ‘I’m just not going to go,” why do you think he did that? Why did he just stop?

Joy: I think they’re used to—a lot of kids are used to just doing without. I knew a kid once who didn’t come to school anymore. It was quite awhile ago. We gave him speech after speech. He was going to get SARB-ed and all that, and he got SARB-ed. So I finally went out to this house and

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SARB is the Student Attendance Review Board, which holds students and parents accountable for school attendance (California Department of Education, n.d.).
found out it was a trailer and found out that he only had one set of clothing and he had no water in the trailer and it was just a hose from, I don’t know. It was a public hose or someone else’s hose. So it was too embarrassing to continue to come to school with really filthy clothes because he slept in them if the water wasn’t running or if he wasn’t able to wash his clothes. So even though the consequences are great they still are used to, “Well, we just can’t do it.”

Joy’s story lends insight into how she views students’ challenges. She investigated the reasons behind her student’s numerous absences, taking the added step of visiting his home herself, rather than resorting to negative but tempting assumptions about the student’s commitment to school or his parents’ lack of concern. Second, she empathized with the student’s circumstances, which helped her understand a worldview that might lead someone in those circumstances to want to give up. Finally, she took steps to rectify the situation by procuring some clothes for the boy, thus removing one small but important barrier to his schooling. As with her student who gave up on the SAT registration process, Joy looked past easy, obvious guesses about the source of the problem, instead investigating and trouble-shooting to help the student find a way through.

Jessica, who teaches the freshmen, learns about some of her students’ home circumstances when she writes letters of recommendation for their scholarship applications:

Jessica: They’ll bring me back this letter of rec packet, and it’s like, "My dad has two broken knees, and is on disability for three years, creating the low-income for us, we all live in a garage, family of eight." I mean they’re sleeping on the floor in blankets. I mean there’s so many issues. So many.

In the same way Joy looked for deeper reasons behind why her students might want to give up on school in small or large ways, in describing the “typical” AVID student, Jessica focused on systemic inequities, rather than individual traits:
Jessica: What's an AVID student like in comparison with the others? Well, they're low income, so it's not like they can go buy an AP textbook to help them study for the test, or get the $1000 Princeton Review SAT workshop, and even just getting them to take the SAT is hard because their families don't understand. A lot of their families are bilingual or Spanish-speaking only. A lot are low income, low, low income, like $15,000 a year...And it's, Oh my gosh, crazy how low. Like $20,000, $18,000 for a family of five. It's just like, "How are you guys doing this?" And we want them to come with their two-inch binder and zipper pouch and all these things, and they just have, they just don't have funds or access. Or when your parents only went to second grade in Mexico, that makes a big difference in your outlook on school, because here you are in 10th or 11th, and have already surpassed [them] sometimes.

In addition to noting the obvious—that many students come from low-income families—Jessica pointed to specific resources students cannot access as a result of that poverty, resources that are available to students from middle and higher income families. The gap between what AVID students and others “have” amounts to a systemic inequity, one that Jessica believes AVID can do something about by providing tutoring, access to rigorous classes, SAT practice, and school supplies. Jessica also pointed to a disconnect between the school’s expectations and students’ circumstances, recognizing that students’ outlook on college speaks more to those circumstances than it does to some innate quality of “determination” or “desire” for success. Here, AVID teachers also make a difference by providing students institutional supports and multiple opportunities to see themselves as part of a community of college-going.

**Creating a Network of Support For College: “It’s Going to Be Me!”**

In speaking with the teachers from Hope HS, it became clear that teachers had found myriad ways to help students develop a college-going identity in response to the constraints created by students’ life circumstances noted previously. These methods included using their everyday interactions with students to hold the line on the goal of...
college access, and creating a network of institutional supports for students that served a variety of strategic goals toward the end of fostering a culture of college-going for all students. Table 11 provides some examples of the support network; I will also elaborate further on some of the examples.
Table 11. Types of Institutional Supports Provided to AVID students at Hope High School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional Support</th>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>College-Going</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple site-based, local and national scholarship opportunities for AVID students</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senior/Freshman mentor pairs and pen pals and senior information panels in the other classes</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVID Coordinator with a release period</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>AVID Site Team that also reviews AVID applications each year</td>
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<td></td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal bulletins that include praise for individual AVID students</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guest speakers, including former AVID students and members in the community from a variety of careers</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple field trips to college campuses each year, strategically planned so that students can visit different schools each year</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVID T-Shirts</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visits to local middle schools to speak with potential AVID students</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ample AVID tutors from 4-year universities only</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easily accessible remediation options during the school day (available to all students)</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined 10/11 AVID class that allows older students to mentor younger ones</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
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<tr>
<td>Annual awards celebration that includes students and families from the local middle schools</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website and Instagram pages with college information, photos of students at field trips, attending events, and working in their AVID classes</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
One tool teachers have used to help foster a culture of college-going among AVID students through institutional support is the master schedule, a process that has potential to be a constraint, as with Hidden Brook HS, but can also become a support.

For example, Jessica, who is also the coordinator, insists upon teaching the freshman classes, even though they are sometimes the most challenging:

Jessica: I believe in being the AVID coordinator and teaching 9th grade AVID because… I'm able to follow kids, and we have a very high retention rate in our AVID program because I'm able to, I know them. Sophomores, junior year, I know them. Rather than somebody who doesn't know them try to convince them why they should stay in the program.

This schedule arrangement also allows Jessica as the coordinator to track students’ progress more effectively over time. Another way teachers use the master schedule is that the program combines the sophomore and juniors together in one class for the strategic purpose of helping students develop supportive relationships and “reminders” of where they are headed in the future:

Jessica: I believe in the sophomore junior combination class because the juniors in a way end up mentoring the sophomores. They just need reminders and feeling like it's part of something bigger.

As Jessica notes, this arrangement provides students the opportunity to “see” themselves as part of a supportive, college-bound “family.”

Students in AVID have other chances to build close relationships with their peers. For example, freshmen are paired with senior pen pals, writing handwritten letters back and forth over the school year. Over time, the seniors become mentors to the freshmen, meeting at lunch to periodically check in and solidify their connections:

Jessica: Family—they need to feel like there's more than just the teacher looking out for them. We meet [at lunch] about a bunch of different topics, like A-G requirements. We meet about leadership roles that they
can take on in high school. The seniors tell the freshmen about community service opportunities, how important it is to be organized with their binders, and then just also be that familiar face, so that when they see AVID students...they see themselves. [For the freshmen], there’s that older student who is "like me three years ago sitting in Mrs. ___'s room who I'm going to be in the future."

In addition to serving as mentors, seniors also visit the other AVID classes to serve on informational panels, providing insight and advice to younger students:

Jessica: They come in and they talk to all the kids in AVID about their experience senior year applying for colleges, how much money they got, how they were able to utilize the program to its full effect senior year.

When students become seniors, they want to be part of passing on that knowledge to the younger students, returning to Jessica’s class to ask if they, too, can sit on the senior panel that visits the younger students, completing a circle of support from year to year.

Not only can students “see” themselves in their fellow, older peers, but they can also visit the AVID website or Instagram account for updates on the program and to see photos of the students in action, an important visual aide to the program’s goal of making sure students feel part of the culture of college-going:

Jessica: Just to see themselves—I've got pictures of all the kids on there, and like all, just “You're part of something bigger,” you know?

To help students visualize themselves as future college students, field trips are strategically planned so teachers can use the schedule as a carrot to students who might need an extra incentive to stay motivated and focused on their goals:

Jessica: I've also broken down our field trips by grade level so we're not repeating where we're going. So I can say, "Next year you get to go to UCLA." You know what I mean? It's like these little reminders of why they're here.

Finally, at the end of every year, the program hosts a big AVID celebration, an event that not only acknowledges graduating students' success, but that also serves as an early
invitation to younger students to start getting ready for college. For not only are students at Hope HS invited, but so are their parents, as are site and district administrators and students and families from the middle schools that feed into the high school. Richard acknowledged that enrolling AVID students who already want to go to college is nice, but many students do not yet know college is open to them:

Richard: We like to get the students who are already motivated with individual determination, but that is sometimes something we have to build within them, because for a lot of them it's their first time. I mean some of them are getting more educated at this point than their parents [who have] either a 6th grade or an 8th grade education and some just high school. So for them to see the goal is difficult because they don’t see it within their home structure.

The teachers explained that bringing students in to the culture of college-going must start early, especially for those who haven’t had exposure to that world, and the AVID Awards Night helps support that goal:

Richard: I think it takes a while for them to start noticing that, and I think what really helps out is...the AVID Awards Night. So the 9th grade, 10th grade, 11th grade, 12th grade, they all participate, plus the middle school students participate so they’re able to see kind of what those kids are doing. So they’re able to see what’s going on and then from there they can start realizing hey, they can say, “Ok this is where I need to go. Look what they’re doing and look what university they’re going to, look at what scholarships.” So they can see, “I’m just like them.” So that helps build the momentum for them to want to come to school and start building their own individual determination.

Over and over again, teachers reported the importance that students “see” themselves reflected in the college-going culture, so that they, too, come to believe they are capable of achieving that success. Teachers at Hope HS were not the only ones who commented on wanting to help students re-think messages about themselves or view themselves in a new light. Chris at Hidden Crest High School, for example, spoke eloquently about his desire for students to challenge negative messages they’ve heard about themselves:
Chris: My responsibility primarily is to keep them motivated to succeed, academically and through personal growth. I think it's a big responsibility that I get them to erase the label that has been put upon them for whatever reason, because it's because they're a minority, they have a low GPA, they're male, they're female—whatever they've been told. I think it's very much in priority, not even as an AVID teacher, just as a person, like my calling is to get people to erase their labels, and then allow them to turn that into something.

Chris’s stated desire to help students “erase labels” put on them and to motivate students to succeed mirrors the comments from teachers at Hope High School, but at Hidden Crest, there isn’t the same broad, deep network of support for AVID students, making it much harder for a lone teacher like Chris to help students cultivate a college-going identity on his own. Even if other teachers at Hidden Crest espouse the same goal, students need multiple opportunities within the institution to encounter and inhabit a college-going culture, something that is nearly impossible on a campus where AVID is “hidden.”

Using Data For Equity: “It’s a Game Changer”

In addition to helping create a culture of college-going through a support network, the AVID teachers at Hope HS have found ways to track students’ progress, so that data becomes an important part of not only making sure the program is meeting its goals, but in ensuring support for the program on campus:

Jessica: So, actually we have some really great data on our AVID students here going on to college and staying. They're like staying in the 90 percentile. Compared to, you know, the college drop-out rate is like 50%, 40% of students drop out. We might have 10% attrition, compared to 50% nationwide, right? And when you're talking low-income, first generation kids, then it's a game changer.

Jessica shows the data to the principal, who sees what the students are accomplishing:

Jessica: [The principal] is also a big advocate for hope and opportunity, providing hope and opportunity to students. He loves AVID in that sense
because he sees what we do. He sees our data and he sees look at—out of the senior class last year over 85% of them were Free and Reduced lunch, first generation kids. Yeah all but one or two got into a 4-year. This is providing hope and opportunity to the less served.

And when the principal sees what the students are doing, he passes that information on to the staff, giving AVID success stories exposure to the broader school community:

Jessica: He sends out an email every week with a picture of some kids on campus and AVID’s often a highlight. It’s highlighted maybe once a month. He’ll put some sort of AVID highlight. I sent a picture about [Richard’s] 4th period. One hundred percent were accepted to college in his 4th period so he put it in the staff bulletin.

Jessica has also used data to build a thriving site team, a step that teachers at Lone Lake HS also implemented as a means toward marshaling political support on campus for AVID, and like teachers at Lone Lake HS, Jessica uses the lure of food to attract teachers to the meetings:

Joy: Well, the best thing about our school AVID program is Jessica is the leader, and she’s a great cook. So our site teams always meet under the auspices of lunch, and she provides it. And everyone is happy and anxious and excited to be part of the site [team] because they know they get a delicious and free and creative lunch and, in their thanks, they’re happy to be on board. I know it’s sad, but it’s food.

Once Jessica felt established in the program, she started bringing on teachers from other departments to participate in the site team:

Jessica: I got that together maybe in my 4th year or 5th year as AVID coordinator. I didn’t do it for the first few years; I just met with the teachers and not outside of AVID. So once I started incorporating an English teacher and a math and a science and now I have somebody from every department, a counselor, two administrators come to our site team meetings. It’s pretty big. It’s like 16 people you know, and they get to look at our data.

In creating the site team, Jessica waited to bring in members outside of AVID until she felt the program was well on its way to accomplishing some of its core goals:
Jessica: I think one of my strong suits is data and promoting data, and once we started looking at the data and looking at, “Hey our kids are doing better than everybody else, our kids are doing better schoolwide in comparison to schoolwide,” I started getting a site team together.

Jessica’s comfort and familiarity with the data—students’ grades, college application and acceptance rates, Advanced Placement sign-ups—became an asset she could use to garner political support for AVID. Once teachers saw what students were overcoming to gain access to college, they became even more supportive of the program:

Jessica: That was a big shift in our site team. Once I put their transcripts in front of them, 10 AVID seniors’ transcripts and essays about AVID in front of them, and said these are our students and what they’re saying, the classes they’re taking. Look how some of them had to repeat certain things or look at all the turmoil going on in their lives. [The principal] liked one of them so much he emailed the whole staff. You know just to hear that student voice makes all the difference.

The site team, then, became a vehicle for driving support for AVID and for creating a network of support for students, and Jessica’s strategic use of data has helped reinforce that support. Having the entire site team review AVID applications, for example, has helped content teachers become stakeholders with a better understanding of the program, its objectives, and the students it serves:

Jessica: I just started thinking, in order to be successful as a program you need buy-in from the staff, like you need staff members who know what we’re doing so when some kid says "I'm in AVID," it's like, "Oh yeah, I graded 20 AVID applications at lunch with Mrs. ____." And they know what it takes to get in, and it's not just some class you just circle on your course selection sheet. It's actually, there's more thought put into it, that the kid actually applied. So, I've noticed since I've had the site team do that there's been a greater awareness of our program. And also just some more ownership from teachers.

It is this kind of strategic thinking and use of data to build political support that has helped the AVID program at Hope HS become a “game changer” for students.
Turning Hardship into Opportunity: “See? It Pays!”

The processes and structures teachers have put in place to support students in developing college-going identities work in concert with teachers’ individual efforts in their everyday interactions with students. In describing helping a student figure out how to convince her mom to let her go to college, for example, Jessica turned the student’s low income into an incentive:

Jessica: [The student said,] “My mom says that she doesn't want me to go because it's a waste of time and a waste of money. And I said, "You are very low income." She's on Free and Reduced lunch, which to me means she'll get the full amount to go to college and more. So I was telling her, "Well maybe your mom needs to see that."

Indeed, Jessica reminds students over and over that coming from a low-income family does open up access to financial support for college that students may not know about:

Jessica: I definitely talk to them all the time about it and try to reinforce it and just talk about all the kids that have gone through this program and all the things they’ve received, all the money they’ve received and grants and scholarships. I mean if you’re low income in this nation there’s a lot of money for you, money that they’ve never seen before and their parents haven’t seen.

The effort teachers put toward helping students apply for scholarships pays off. Jessica described one student who recently won an extremely prestigious national scholarship:

Jessica: I know that he has about a 3.0, 3.2 maybe, super low income to the point of like when he asked me this year for a scholarship to our fieldtrip [that cost $8.00] he was like in tears. Yeah and he’s such a nice kid. I mean you could just see the weight of the world on his shoulders as he walks around life. I think it’s just him and his mom at home, and his mom hasn’t been working, and I don’t know if they’re struggling to pay for things. He got into Chico State and he got some money for Chico State too, which is awesome, so I think he’s going to go on a full ride basically to Chico State.
When senior AVID students start getting accepted to college, receiving grants and scholarships, and carving their path forward, they bring those experiences back to the younger students as part of the network discussed earlier:

Jessica: And then the senior panel comes in to talk to all the AVID classes and they tell them that exact same thing. And the kids are hearing this saying, "It's going to be me! It's going to be me!"

For students, “hope and opportunity” becomes real when they see students who look like them, who come from the same school and community, who have some of the same circumstances they do, make it to college. Students start to see that going to college is just the beginning—that their hard work will pay off, and sooner than they realize:

Jessica: We have kids in AVID who get, I don't know, like $11,000, $12,000 a year at [CSU]. It costs $7,000 to go there. They get [another] $1,000 scholarship. It becomes $6,000. All of a sudden they have this extra money. All of a sudden they come back and say, "Mrs.____, I bought a computer," or "I bought a car," or "I'm helping my mom pay rent and I've never been able to help her." And it's all because of this aid they're getting. And it's like, "See? It pays!"

Highly Individualized Support: “They Need to See the Whites of My Eyes”

As discussed earlier, many students come to AVID knowing little about college or how to get there:

Jessica: And the sad thing is they don't even know about it. They just know what they know. They know their parents work as a painter, or whatever, and that's just the norm. But if you want a game change, you need these programs like AVID or Upward Bound. I'm talking like one out of 10 [college] applications is a low-income kid. Even to have the guts to apply, you need a program like AVID—they don't know. Their parents don't know.

Indeed, several teachers reported that often they do find themselves taking on a parental role with students, filling in for parents who are absent, who lack financial resources or college knowledge, or for a variety of other reasons are not able to help shepherd their students along the pipeline to college:
Joy: You know they don't have individuals to get on them at home because they're worried about the rent, you know, they don't even see. Maybe parents don't even notice.

Sometimes parents do want to be involved and are paying close attention, but simple miscommunication can make it hard for them to connect with the school. Joy shared an amusing but telling story about one such miscommunication:

Joy: I had—this was a long time ago—I had a parent who was not English [speaking] and I kept calling her saying, "Your son has an F! Your son has an F! Don't you want to come talk to me?" I never got a response.

Come to find out at the end of the year, she finally came in and she said, "F not fine?" She was Filipino, and her son had been telling her that F meant "fine." And he must have also gotten to the phone calls before she got home. This, is all year this had been happening.

We both laughed at the linguistic mixup, but Joy’s point was valid—teachers do not always know why a parent may not be calling or e-mailing to check in on their students.

In suburban schools where many higher income parents routinely intervene on their students’ behalf, teachers can easily attribute lack of such contact to erroneous causes.

Regardless of the cause for parental absence, the teachers at Hope HS step in to help fill part of that parental role. In the case of a student whose parents were both deceased, a senior who was about to graduate high school and go on to college, this role became even more important from Richard’s perspective:

Richard: I can't imagine, because I know it's going to hit her. She's going to go to high school graduation. I know that's going to be hard. I know that's coming. But I think most of us, as male teachers that have had her, another guy who had her last year, we've all been good about helping her out. Just always saying, “Hi” to her, making the extra effort, because we know she needs the male, father figure. So we've been there to help her and support her.

In helping this particular student, Richard provided guidance on applying to college that emphasized her independence, for she would soon be on her own:
Richard: So, her thing has always been, "I really want to go to college, this has always been my motivation, but how do I deal with the fact that both of my parents are dead? What do I put in my FAFSA? How do I claim that? Am I considered an independent student? So, what I've done with this particular student is even though she's a great student, honors student, AP student, that other aspect of not knowing what to do has become a very important role. And so I've been really helping her, communicating with her, having her communicate with the schools, like how do I fill out my FAFSA, what do I do about my financial aid? What do I write about my situation? What scholarships are available for me to pay because I'm the only person that can pay?

And the good thing about it is I haven't been doing it for her. I've been showing her how to do it. Because I figure at this point she's going to be independent she's going to have to learn the process all over again next year. So it's just about really making sure that I communicate with the student, teaching her how to ask the right questions, how to communicate [with], and building in the time for that student. So whenever she needs extra help I'm going to support her, just because of her situation being so unique compared to the rest of the students.

Richard's ability to figure out what his students needed given their unusual circumstances was echoed among the other teachers. When students face difficult circumstances, teachers at Hope HS described how they marshaled school resources and made sure students had what they needed, sending students the message that college was a goal they could and should aspire to, regardless of what was happening in their lives. Richard offered one example of a student several years ago who had become pregnant during her senior year. Rather than drop out of high school, she was determined to graduate and attend college, despite the fact that her own parents had kicked her out of the house. Once Richard found out about her situation, he moved to put supports in place to help the student stay on track:

Richard: So from that point on I made sure I communicated with counseling to let them know what was going on, let administration know

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7 The FAFSA is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, a government website (www.fafsa.gov) that acts as a clearinghouse for all financial aid data which is submitted to colleges and universities to assist them in preparing financial aid offers.
what was going on with this particular student. All of us reached out to
make sure that she was still in a home setting, that she was able to find the
support that she needed. I communicated with all her AP teachers as well.
So that was the good thing. So they kind of all were very supportive,
giving her a little bit more flexibility when turning in assignments. She
knew that college was going to be the best thing for her.

So, we did support her, making sure she turned in all her assignments on
time, making sure she filled out her FAFSA, everything else. It was going
to be a little different now because she was going to be considered an
independent student with a new child. So we talked to her about how to
fill out the FAFSA. Made sure we communicated with CSU about her
new situation. And so everybody was very accommodating, making sure
she got all the support that she needed. She was still able to graduate high
school on time, get into college, and I think this is her last year at CSU.
She's going to be graduating with a degree.

In this student’s case, Richard stepped in, helping her apply to college, gathering financial
information, contacting teachers and counselors, and offering emotional support. But the
student's parents were temporarily out of the picture, so Richard stepped in.

Teachers also offered individualized support in other ways. Joy described an
interaction she had with a student who had suddenly become upset during a guest
speaker presentation:

Joy: You know I had a guest speaker, who happened to be a friend of
mine, and a student fell apart screaming, and then come to find out she'd
become homeless the night before. All I did was ask where her binder was,
and she "blah," went crazy. It was a binder check day. Come to find out
an hour later after she fell apart that they were kicked out of their home,
and the binder was still there, and she didn't know if she could get back to
it, and they didn't have a place to live and go anywhere, and so they were
in the car last night, and so on and on. You know. But that's embarrassing
to share, and it's embarrassing to even not have your binder when you're
an A student.

SV: So, what ended up happening with that situation?

SV: I talked to her at length. She needed a hug. Just knowing that I would,
I asked, “What can I do to help you?” "If you can just call, e-mail my
other teachers, let them know that I can't give them these. I don't want to
tell everybody. So if they can give me another day to turn in this," and
some things like that.
Joy recognized that the student was in distress, waiting to talk to her until she could do so in private. Then she asked the student how she could help, giving her some control over a situation in which she felt like she had none. Joy explained that one-on-one support is an important part of her role as an AVID teacher, support that the student who’d given up signing up for the SAT evidently needed:

Joy: Kids need absolute personal help. Just talking to a group of kids wasn’t enough. Kids really needed someone sitting right next to them quietly working through the situation whether it’s the question or working through something at a computer. For some reason they really needed to see the whites of my eyes to get an answer to know it was true and it was for them, because for some reason when I make general statements for some reason many of our AVID kids don’t think it might apply to them.

SV: Why do you think that is?

Joy: I think that maybe they’ve been looked over in the past or maybe announcements are just too impersonal and they really need a personal invitation to sign up for the SAT. Even though I can make that announcement one hundred times they don’t really think it applies to them because so much doesn’t apply to them and they’re so used to just doing without. “Well my parents didn’t need it and they made it so I probably don’t need it. My dad didn’t sign up for the SAT.”

Joy’s rationale for providing that individual support—that maybe students had been overlooked in the past and needed a “personal invitation,” speaks to the value of understanding where students are coming from, both in terms of life circumstances and emotionally.

As Joy’s examples demonstrated, much of the work of making sure students have access to the culture of college-going and that they identify with what it means to be a college-bound student, happens in everyday interactions with students. But that work does not end when students have been accepted to college. As seniors, when they begin the process of transitioning out of high school, many of them experience doubt and anxiety about the future, especially those who will be the first in their families to go to
college. They have questions about finances, housing, and leaving home, questions that for first-generation college students, their families may not be able to help answer. So Richard helps fill in those gaps in college knowledge that middle class students often get from their college-educated parents:

Richard: For a lot of them it’s difficult for them even though they do want to get out, and for some of them saying that they have to leave their home because their home environment’s not very good. It’s that next step of having to do the housing and, “How much do I have to pay? What if I live off campus?” So I spend some time with those students comparing living off campus and living on campus. So they’re starting to notice that there is a difference, because when you live off campus you have a lot more responsibility. When you live on campus you don’t have to worry about the cable, the electric and all that other stuff.

While Richard works with students as a class to help them know what is in store for them, he also makes a point to meet with each student individually, recognizing that not all students will bring their concerns to him, an observation that Joy had also noted:

SV: Do you find a lot of those conversations happen one on one as opposed to like in the class?

Richard: Well we do it as a whole group but then once you do the whole group presentation then the students come. Then when I start doing the one on one mentoring about what’s going on, what’s happening and what are their fears and what are their concerns.

SV: Do they come up to you ad hoc or do you say “Ok let’s talk to you, let’s talk to you?”

Richard: Yeah I go through every single one because I know sometimes they don’t have that wherewithal to kind of come to talk to me. There’s a lot of times I just come to them and ask them what’s going on and then that initiates the conversation.

Providing one-on-one support to students makes it that much harder for them to give up on themselves, as they see their teachers there ready to help them, hold them accountable, and help them access the knowledge and means to get to college.
Conclusion

This chapter explored teachers’ strategic decision-making when enacting the critical conditions of a culture of college-going and institutional supports, in the context of the technical, political and cultural dimensions of school reform. First, teachers at Hidden Crest HS discussed frustrations with the master schedule process, a primarily technical constraint that reflected the political and cultural realities of limited support for AVID on campus. Teachers responded in a variety of ways to mitigate the effects of the constraints created by the master schedule. Next, I reviewed examples of how teachers from Hidden Brook and Lone Lake helped facilitate access to rigorous coursework in response to various institutional constraints. At Lone Lake HS, teachers described the implications of a highly competitive college-going culture on their campus combined with limited political support for AVID. They responded to these constraints by developing a strong AVID site team and coaching students through how to approach their rigorous classes. Finally, teachers at Hope HS described how most AVID students come from families with little knowledge of or access to college, a primarily cultural dynamic that teachers responded to by creating a variety of political and technical supports for college-going, along with supporting students one-on-one in their development of a college-going identity. Chapter 7 includes a discussion of the promising practices that emerged from the findings discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, along with some of the challenges that emerged in teachers’ efforts to respond to various institutional constraints.
CHAPTER 7: THE PROMISE AND PARADOX IN ENSURING EQUITY IN COLLEGE ACCESS IN SUBURBAN SCHOOLS

Introduction

Educators across settings often espouse the goal of ensuring equity and diversity in college access. The degree to which certain schools, including those in suburban settings that enroll relatively few underrepresented students, enact policies and practices designed to ensure equity in access varies. This study sought to shed some light on what it looks like on the ground when schools adopt a reform designed to improve access to college for low-income and ethnic minority students in suburban settings. Focusing the inquiry on teachers’ experiences working in one such reform, the study was guided by three research questions:

1. How do secondary teachers working in suburban schools enact the critical conditions of a college-going culture and institutional support in their everyday interactions with students enrolled in a college prep program?

2. How do secondary teachers make sense of their actions in the context of an intervention program and the broader school culture?

3. What is the relationship between school context factors (political, technical and cultural supports and constraints) and how teachers enact the critical conditions?

These research questions are grounded in the Oakes et al. (2004) framework, which describes seven “critical conditions” that schools must provide in order to ensure equity and diversity in college access. I focused on how teachers enact two of seven “critical conditions”: access to a culture of college-going and to institutional supports (Oakes et al., 2004). According to Oakes et al. (2004) and supporting research outlined in Chapter 2, students must have access to a culture of college-going in which “teachers, administrators, parents, and students expect students to have all the experiences they
need for high achievement and college preparation” (p. 10). In such a culture, adults must “work diligently to eliminate school-sanctioned alternatives to hard work and high expectations” (p. 10). Schools must also provide interventions that “emphasize to students that college preparation is a normal part of their childhood and youth” so that students come to believe that college is “for them and is not only reserved for the exceptional few who triumph over adversity to rise above all others,” a belief that contributes to the development of a college-going identity (p. 10). School interventions can come in the form of institutional supports that include “networks of adults and peers who help access” important technical resources like tutoring, counseling services, SAT preparation and “college knowledge” (p. 11). Since research suggests that “the intensity and quality of students’ high school courses is the most powerful factor in increasing students’ chances for completing a four-year college degree,” institutional supports must also facilitate students’ access to rigorous courses (p. 11).

Participants in the study included ten college-prep program teachers in four suburban Southern California high schools, who sat for two interviews each and provided nearly 60 narratives describing their everyday interactions with students. The four public schools in this study are all “high-performing” and provide safe and adequate school facilities, qualified teachers, family-neighborhood-school connections around college-going, and a rigorous academic curriculum, all critical conditions for equity and diversity in college access (Oakes et al., 2004). The college-preparatory reform that served as the backdrop for this study was AVID, which is a college readiness program that helps students prepare for the rigors of a four-year college education. While this was not a study of AVID, the program does contain features that created a useful opportunity for
investigating a reform in action. For example, AVID espouses the mission “to close the achievement gap by preparing all students for college readiness and success in a global society” (AVID, 2016). Avid also requires schools to make several technical changes such as creating elective courses, providing college tutors, increasing enrollment in advanced and honors courses, all of which demand that schools contend with site-based political and cultural norms. Using organizational learning theories to guide analysis, including theory of action (Argyris & Schön, 1978), sensemaking (Weick et al., 2005) and the technical, political, and cultural domains of school reform (Oakes, 1992), three primary findings emerged (addressed in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6):

1. From teachers’ perspectives, the degree of perceived campus-wide support for AVID stems in part from the relationship between schoolwide and AVID demographics.

2. Teachers respond to the degree of perceived campus-wide support for AVID by reconsidering the definition of an AVID student. This process has implications for equity and diversity in college access.

3. AVID teachers across contexts recognize and respond to institutional constraints in strategic ways, both in marshaling support for the program and in their everyday interactions with students.

Taking a step back, these findings suggest several instructional and institutional practices that help facilitate enactment of the critical conditions of a culture of college-going and institutional supports across suburban school settings. This discussion will first explore such “promising” practices, including how they support and extend current research on the topic. The findings also point to political and cultural constraints that create a “paradox” in ensuring equity and diversity in college access in suburban schools,
a paradox that I also explore in this chapter. Implications for research, policy and practice are addressed throughout the discussion.

**The Promise of Ensuring Equity and Diversity in College Access**

This study afforded me the opportunity to see what it looks like when “equity in learning opportunities” is held as “an important ethical and moral standard” in a suburban school (Datnow & Park, 2015, p. 51). While teachers in all four schools expressed some degree of commitment to equity, it was at Hope HS that equity emerged as a cultural value that all three teachers enacted in their everyday interactions with students. What I learned is that not all AVID teachers, or counselors or administrators for that matter, automatically become “institutional agents” of empowerment for students just by working with underserved students or even just by believing in students’ abilities. Instead, I found that when teachers encounter fewer institutional constraints, or when they are able to work in a supportive environment to counter those constraints, developing a culture of college-going through institutional supports becomes more likely. In short, no one teacher alone can enact the critical conditions for equity and diversity in college access without broader site-based approaches that support that enactment.

In thinking about how to describe the promising practices I observed, I turned to Stanton-Salazar (2011) for guidance in how to envision the role individuals within a school organization might play when helping students access critical academic and social support. Conceiving of individuals within social organizations like schools as crucial to social change, Stanton-Salazar (2011) puts forth a notion of teachers and other actors as potential “institutional agents.” He argues that “the individual or actor’s potential role as ‘institutional agent’ becomes manifest when, on behalf of another, he or she acts to
directly transmit, or negotiate the transmission of, highly valued institutional support” (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, pp. 1075–1076). Such “institutional support” includes “those resources, opportunities, privileges, and services which are highly valued, yet differentially allocated within any organization or society that is invested in social inequality” (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, pp. 1075–1076). Stanton-Salazar (2011) further argues that such “institutional agents” are critical for what he calls “low-status” students—those who come from low-income or language-minority families or who come from underrepresented minority groups.

What I found was that being an “institutional agent” in Stanton-Salazar’s (2011) definition was a necessary but insufficient condition for teachers who sought to empower their students. In other words, just being an AVID teacher is not enough—that teacher must also facilitate access to critical resources in order to become an “institutional agent.” The promising practices I discovered involved such facilitation. While Stanton-Salazar’s (2011) framework emerges from a social capital perspective, which was not a theoretical lens I used in my analysis, the language he uses to argue about the role “institutional agents” must play is useful in my discussion of the promising practices that emerged in this study, practices that act as “countervailing forces” that drive student “empowerment,” a “process of gaining resources [and] competencies needed to increase control over one’s life and accomplish important life goals (Maton & Salem, 1995)” (p. 1075).

In teachers’ stories I found great promise, indeed great “hope and opportunity” for other similarly situated schools grappling with meeting the needs of underrepresented students. This section describes four promising practices that help students access a culture of college-going through institutional supports: viewing students’ circumstances
through an empowerment lens, providing individualized support, using data for equity, and creating a network of support for college-going.

**The Promise: Adopting an Empowerment Stance**

While I did see some evidence of teachers viewing their AVID students’ life challenges as opportunities for empowerment, at no school was that practice more consistent than at Hope HS, where “hope and opportunity” dominated teachers’ stories and discussions of their students. How teachers made sense of their students’ life circumstances, such as extreme poverty, language-minority status, and being the first in the family to attend college, spoke to broader cultural attitudes shared by the school community. Rather than adopting a notion of such students as lacking in some way, teachers instead found ways to help the students view their own circumstances as opportunities for advancement while also mobilizing school resources in support of students.

When teachers and school leaders view students as participants in a nested system of structures, it is easier for those teachers to see how school contributes to, and can therefore mitigate, inequities inherent in those systems. As Stanton-Salazar (2011) argues,

“[A] teacher, motivated by principles of social justice and equity, can advocate and distribute resources to those low-status students he sees as normally not benefitting from the school’s stock of institutional resources (e.g. college preparatory curriculum, information regarding college admission requirements and financial aid)” (p. 1086).

Along these lines, rather than speaking about students’ challenges as individual traits that cannot be altered, teachers at Hope HS spoke of students who didn’t have “access,” or whose parents “didn’t know what they didn’t know,” a conception of students’ circumstances that puts the school system in a position to mitigate structural
disadvantages. Jessica explained how she talks to students about their low-income status, for example:

Jessica: I definitely talk to them all the time about it and try to reinforce it and just talk about all the kids that have gone through this program and all the things they’ve received, all the money they’ve received and grants and scholarships. I mean if you’re low income in this nation there’s a lot of money for you, money that they’ve never seen before and their parents haven’t seen.

In response to the reality that many of their students have few financial resources and have little knowledge about how to access college, teachers at Hope HS have worked over years to exert influence over the school’s culture, marshaling support for the AVID program, and thus for their students. For such students, AVID has become a “game changer” as it provides “resources and support to [students] that significantly enables [them] to effectively navigate and exert control over” their schooling, control that becomes “developmentally empowering” (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1078).

Teachers and administrators in all settings can learn from this point of view—one that helps students view their own challenging life circumstances as opportunities. Just as some of the parents of students at Hope HS “don’t know what they don’t know,” my sense is that many teachers at the other schools likewise “don’t know what they don’t know” when it comes to a) ways schools can mitigate structural inequities that affect students’ access to college, and b) ways in which students’ life circumstances do not function as limiting factors but rather as motivation for success and tools of empowerment.

The Promise: Individualized Support

Another promising practice that emerged from the study was that teachers in all settings sought ways to provide highly individualized support for their students, support
that depended on their knowledge of students’ concerns, their personalities, their home and life circumstances, and their academic strengths and challenges, even in the face of sometimes overwhelming institutional resistance. Whether it was Humera’s tireless efforts to make sure her students had access to AP Spanish, or Heather’s creative outreach to a math teacher on behalf of a struggling student, teachers across the board found creative ways to meet the needs of their students. This one-on-one work helps students
devolve “coping strategies” like “problem-solving capacities, help-seeking orientations, networking skills, and instrumental behaviors which are directed toward overcoming stressful institutional barriers and harmful ecological conditions” (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1093).

Teachers paid close attention to making sure that their students knew how to take action on their own behalf, how to build relationships with their teachers and peers, and how to ask for help from the most appropriate source. Thinking back to Richard’s support for a senior whose parents had passed away, he emphasized the need for her to know how to advocate for herself:

Richard: And the good thing about it is I haven't been doing it for her. I've been showing her how to do it. Because I figure at this point she's going to be independent she's going to have to learn the process all over again next year.

I felt encouraged by the degree to which teachers in a variety of settings felt that their role was to help empower students to work on their own behalf, a mindset that all teachers who work with vulnerable youth should embrace. Schools hoping to make it easier for teachers to provide such personalized support can enact a number of technical changes, including lowering class sizes for support classes (a need that nearly every teacher expressed), ensuring enough tutors are hired for each section, and giving teachers time in the school day or week to meet with one another to troubleshoot students’ needs. I found
that such discussions happened, but they were often “on the fly” or during inopportune moments. Making it a priority in all settings would help AVID teachers fulfill their “institutional agent” roles more fully.

**The Promise: Data for Equity**

In addition to understanding student’s circumstances and providing individual support, another promising practice that I observed was using data to reach the “right” students and to garner political support for the AVID program. Knowing the student population seemed an important factor for using data to target students who would be best served in AVID, including lower income students, those from underrepresented groups at the university level, those who are the first in their families to go to college, and those who have special circumstances—in other words, students who do not already have access to college knowledge and resources by virtue of income and life circumstance. It was only at Hope High School that teachers discussed their systematic use of data to recruit and support such students, holding an equity mindset throughout their endeavors. There, Jessica explained how she uses data to essentially exclude students with institutional advantages, so as to make room for students without those advantages. In describing the former, Jessica explained:

Jessica: That’s kind of a complaint from some non-AVID students, is that some students would like into AVID, but they don't qualify. They see the application. "Mom, can I be in this program? It says you need to be a first generation college student." No. And in a sense, I think they'll be fine. They don’t need us. They'll be fine with their moms. And that's great. That's what we want for all kids.

Here, Jessica has chosen to “go against the grain” of a system of schooling that privileges advantaged youth, and instead enables “the empowerment of low-status individuals in need” (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1087). She is able to accomplish this potentially
politically precarious approach because the site principal, and indeed the school community, values “hope and opportunity” and serving the students who most need it.

Teachers at Hope HS also use data to build support for the program by continually informing school leaders about AVID students’ successes. This practice is something all AVID teachers can adopt as an easy, no-risk approach to help administrators find a reason to allocate financial and other technical support to the program. When principals then turn around to disseminate the data to the staff and larger community, it helps support an inclusive culture of college-going that goes “against the grain” of a culture of college access as reserved only for the select few (Oakes et al. 2004).

The Promise: A Network of Support for College-Going

A final promising practice that I observed, especially at Hope HS, was the creation of a variety of institutional supports that helped build and support access to a culture of college-going and that helped students develop a college-going identity. As Stanton-Salazar (2011) argues:

“Among lower-status members of society (e.g. youth from working-class and ethnic minority communities), access to institutional support is usually an extraordinary phenomenon, and happens through involvement through relationships with committed institutional agents through special school and educational programs, social service agencies, different and effective intervention and mentor programs—social capital for purposes of intervention or empowerment” (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1077).

One could argue that a school that adopts the AVID program is by definition creating a means for “institutional support” for youth from low-income and ethnic minority students. But just as being an AVID teacher does not absolve an individual from enacting the values of an “institutional agent,” having an AVID program does not absolve a school of the hard work required to foster an inclusive culture of college-going that
empowers all students, regardless of their backgrounds. Teachers at Hope HS provided students with numerous opportunities to see themselves as college-bound students, such as bringing in guest speakers, facilitating senior-freshman mentor relationships, strategically planning college visits, creating a lively website and Instagram account, and fostering other formal and informal opportunities to engage in conversation around college and college-going. Such practices are much more difficult to enact without schoolwide support for AVID, but it is possible. It does not cost money to create a website or Instagram account, or to facilitate student-student mentorships. Teachers from all school settings can enact similar strategies to help students learn to view themselves as college-going, efforts that can have a positive effect on the school culture more over time.

Summary

This section described four promising practices that help students access a culture of college-going through institutional supports, including viewing students’ circumstances through an empowerment lens, providing individualized support, using data for equity, and creating a network of support for college-going. The next section examines dimensions of a paradox that makes it harder for even equity-minded “institutional agents” to enact the critical conditions for equity and diversity in college access in suburban settings.

The Paradox in Ensuring Equity in Access to College

In addition to a number of promising practices that helped teachers facilitate access to institutional supports and a culture of college-going, numerous constraints arose across settings that made it much harder for teachers to act as “institutional agents.” One such constraint was that in certain schools, teachers reported that demographic factors
influenced how AVID was perceived on campus, a perception that led them to reconsider the definition of an AVID student. While this constraint emerged at Hidden Brook, Lone Lake and Hidden Crest high schools, in Chapter 5 I explored in depth the process teachers at Lone Lake High School initiated to re-define their AVID’s program’s mission. The moves at Lone Lake HS to modify the target demographic for AVID emphasized starkly what amounts to a paradox in ensuring access to college-going for underrepresented students in higher income, suburban schools. The paradox is that such students may experience some of the critical conditions for equity and diversity in college access by attending well-resourced, high-performing schools with highly-qualified teachers and a strong college-going culture, conditions that some schools in lower-income communities struggle to provide. But those same students may find it harder to access the institutional supports necessary for full access to that culture of college-going due to cultural and political constraints endemic to such schools. In short, the choices teachers made at Lone Lake HS have implications for equity and diversity in college access, and deserve further consideration. As such, this section will attempt to make sense of teachers’ decisions by examining multiple dimensions of this paradox using the theoretical frameworks that guided this dissertation.

**Identifying the Paradox: What It Means to Exist at the Margins**

In order to understand why it can be so difficult to ensure equity and diversity in college access in schools that maintain high standards when it comes to most of the critical conditions, I would like to first explain how I came to see the paradox in the first place. To this end, I begin this section with one teacher’s reflections on serving underrepresented students in a school setting where AVID exists at the margins.
Humera’s insights from her work at Hidden Brook HS provide some useful context to understand why the AVID teachers at Lone Lake HS made the choices they did. Humera and the two teachers at Lone Lake work in similar settings, all three have previously worked in districts that served primarily low-income and underrepresented students, and all three expressed keen awareness of the political and cultural dynamics that affect their work and students’ realities on campus. Therefore, examining Humera’s experience a bit closely might help shed light on some of the decisions teachers at Lone Lake HS made in response to institutional constraints. Further, Heather’s comments point to the fact that one teacher alone cannot change a system on her own, a fact that helps put the teachers’ decisions at Lone Lake HS in broader context.

Humera came into teaching with a sense of mission for helping those who needed it most, a conviction that she now maintains despite working in a mostly high-income district:

Humera: I remember when I was a student teacher, I taught in [another district] for one of my semesters. I was doing my BCLAD so they put me in an ELD class. I was with mostly kids like here, like Hispanic kids, lower income and stuff, and I loved it. And then my first year of teaching I went into [another district] in a really low-income school, like 100% Free and Reduced lunch and it was really hard, but you felt like you were doing something.

Despite, or perhaps because of, Humera’s personal commitment to help the students “falling behind,” she recognized that underrepresented students at high-income schools “don’t get all the resources the other kids” at lower-income schools do:

Humera: So the other [districts nearby with more low-income students], I mean I get so jealous when I look at their AVID programs. They don’t have to worry about finding tutors because Gear Up pays the tutors. The district doesn’t have to pay for them so it’s like, “Oh my God, of course they have amazing tutors and college resources and fieldtrips and we don’t have that.”
Humera pointed out the irony that low-income parents desperate for their kids to attend high quality schools may not realize they are sending them to schools that are actually less likely to serve their students’ needs:

Humera: And then you feel for the parents because you’re like, “Did they send them here because they thought they were going to get a better experience?” Whereas maybe they would have had a better experience if they’d just stayed in [other nearby districts]. They would have had more support maybe.

Instead of the students who need it most getting access to financial and other types of support, in higher-wealth districts, such resources often go to the students whose parents have most of the power:

Humera: And that’s not where the focus is in this district. I mean the programs that get the money and the attention are those big broadcast media and dance and the big things that parents care about and their kids are in and they’ll pay extra.

The district has adopted AVID as a means toward providing access to college for their low-income and underrepresented minority students, but from Humera’s perspective, have not committed fully to ensuring equity in distributing district resources to such students:

Humera: So here it just kind of becomes a half-assed version of what it’s supposed to be. You know they just kind of put it in there and yeah we’re doing this, but it’s not true to what the kids need. It shouldn’t be this hard to get tutors for this program and that just kind of shows where the priorities are.

Humera’s awareness of the inequities in distribution of resources offers some hope for schools like hers, ones in which underserved students make up a relatively small percentage of the student population. In fact, like the teachers at Hope HS, Humera recognizes her students as nested within a system that has built-in inequities that have little to do with students’ capabilities or aspirations. In that sense, her awareness is
promising. But one lone teacher fighting the system is not enough to change much in the long term, and indeed can be detrimental to that teacher’s own sense of agency and efficacy. Humera’s frustrations have implications not only for her personally and professionally—but also for how she makes sense of her role as an advocate:

Humera: So it’s just something that’s kind of beyond my control. Unless I’m in the district office it’s just something that I don’t think is going to change. I mean at least in this district. So sometimes I’m like why am I doing all this for AVID if I know that?

In Humera’s case, she worries that she can do little to change things, a powerlessness that is almost too much to bear for teachers who need to have a sense of agency over their work lives.

A Researcher’s Note on Taking a Critical Approach

Turning to Lone Lake HS, I would first like to comment on how I have approached this analysis. As a classroom teacher in the role of a researcher, I find it important to consider Humera’s perspective when diving in to understand why teachers at Lone Lake HS would essentially excise AVID’s equity mission from a program they value and for which they have sacrificed immeasurable time and mental energy. There are a lot of moving pieces, and at the heart of all of them are real people with a range of experiences, hopes, frustrations, and strengths, working in complicated bureaucracies filled with other real people trying to do what they can to survive and thrive as educators. Put another way, “educational reforms are socially constructed phenomena” (Hubbard et al., 2006, p. 9) in which “the agency of and interaction between educators is part of a complex dynamic, shaping and shaped by the structural and cultural features of school and society” (Mehan et al., 2010, p. 100). Adopting language Castagno (2008) uses when discussing her own research, my goal is to “illustrate how systems of power and
structures of privilege and oppression are played out at the local level” (p. 317). Such an approach compels “some measure of critique of individual teachers” because we all have a “role to play in creating and sustaining oppressive systems” (p. 317). That said, my goal here is not to lay blame at the feet of individual educators, but rather to tease out the institutional factors that would contribute to an abandonment of an equity mindset, a goal that does require a close look at teachers’ espoused theories of action, but within the school’s context.

**Understanding the Paradox: Defining “Need” In a Suburban Setting**

Facing the institutional constraint of a school that devalued AVID, teachers at Lone Lake HS chose to “re-brand” the program to be more in line with the school’s priorities. Understanding why the teachers made that strategic decision is crucial. As discussed in Chapter 5, the language of “re-branding” also emerged at Hidden Brook and Hidden Crest high schools, but it was at Lone Lake HS that a concerted effort took place over time to change the focus of AVID.

I have chosen to make sense of teachers’ actions by looking through the lenses of organizational learning and sensemaking, rather than focusing on teachers’ individual values about equity, biases toward students, and attitudes about schooling. While teachers did express such attitudes, what I found was that how teachers made sense of the student data in front of them—grades, achievement patterns, test scores—closely related to the cultural and political realities of their respective school settings. In short, changing a school’s values and priorities in order to gain access to vital technical and political support for AVID seemed too heavy a lift for teachers working on their own to do so, especially when the school community saw no “need” to change. Instead, teachers opted
to change the goal of the AVID program itself, in essence removing the equity mission from a program originally rooted in narrowing the achievement gap.

When examining the AVID program at Lone Lake HS, teachers found a link between the perception on the part of the staff that AVID students were low performing and the perception of the program itself as low performing:

Manuel: Well I think the number one thing that drove [the change] was in order to change perception—performance. Kids have to perform. So we started in the classroom…we came to the agreement that the changes that we make in the classroom will propel the shift in perception.

This discovery presented a choice for AVID teachers. They could focus change efforts on the students currently in the program—work to increase rigor, improve students’ work in their content classes and improve their overall “performance.” Or, teachers could work to change the perception of students’ performance on the part of the staff by communicating more directly with content teachers about students’ successes, thereby countering those negative perceptions. Next, teachers could work to change the school culture from one that supports competition and achievement to one that also supports equity and diversity in advanced classes. Finally, teachers could opt to change how the AVID student was defined, and in the process change the students themselves, in essence changing the face of AVID. Teachers chose the latter.

One obstacle teachers at Lone Lake HS faced when trying to repair AVID’s reputation was that there was little perceived “need” on the part of school leaders and teachers to do anything differently. Manuel compared AVID’s mission of driving schoolwide change toward a culture of college-going for all students to the political realities on his campus:
Manuel (Lone Lake HS): Where I would like it to go is that AVID at some level will be incorporated schoolwide. That’s AVID’s goal, and just be open to incorporating some of the things that we do in AVID into their classrooms. That’s a systematic change that as a site we need to—it’s our PD plan. How do we share? What do we do? What’s the culture that we have here? I guess I would want to see us a little bit more involved in the culture here. Will Lone Lake ever be a full on AVID school? I don’t think so.

SV: Why not?

Manuel: I don’t think there’s a need to be honest with you. Can [AVID] help? Yes but it’s hard to argue that you need AVID if you’re going to Cornell…and I’m ok with that. Because these kids are getting into prestigious schools without AVID. I get that. AVID is just one piece of a large puzzle. That’s fine. We’re for the kid in the middle.

Upon arriving at Lone Lake HS, Manuel initially brought with him a “mentality” of schoolwide change, owing to his previous experience working in a lower-performing school that saw AVID as a driver of schoolwide culture shifts. But his comment that Lone Lake HS likely will not ever be “a full on AVID school” highlights a fundamental incompatibility between the AVID mission and the mission at Lone Lake, which does not address issues of equity, and rather emphasizes high performance and individualism. Manuel thus sensed early on that at Lone Lake HS “pushing” something like AVID on this particular school site did not make sense in that context:

Manuel: We would get more resistance if we try to push it. It’s been a strategic move and I think a necessary move on our part, just understanding the school, the pulse of the school. Why push something that you really schoolwide don’t need? You’ve got to remember I came from 2 sites that were like we need this schoolwide, and maybe my first year here I was like, I still had that mentality then I really had to look at the school a bit closer and realize well now this is different.

As Heather explained, teachers “knew that Lone Lake didn’t fit into the AVID school,” and so their re-branding “strategy” needed to account for that reality. The AVID team’s attention to the political climate at Lone Lake HS contributed to their calculation that
AVID would be most successful if it became a vehicle for supporting the school, rather than the other way around:

Manuel: It’s AVID at a higher performing school so how do we fit? How do we support the school, not how do we support AVID.

For them, the “higher performing” nature of the school climate amounted to a cultural constraint that precluded them from using AVID as a lever to drive schoolwide change. It was just too risky from their point of view. Now, had school leaders charged the AVID teachers with the mission of figuring out how to maintain a vision of equity in college access, granting teachers access to political and technical resources vital to that mission, or had the school culture been one that valued equity on the whole, teachers may have gone a different direction. But that is not what happened here.

Instead, teachers proceeded by looking at ways to change AVID to meet the needs of the school. That process began with teachers reviewing data. In fact, data seems to have been central to their process:

Heather explained that the teachers zeroed in on the students with “extenuating circumstances,” because teachers felt that the students in AVID at the time who met typical AVID criteria had needs beyond the program’s capability to address:

Heather: [W]e had the AVID kid who had basically a bad work ethic and wasn’t doing homework, wasn’t showing up to school and their needs were just so much greater in terms of their extenuating circumstances. There’s like language deficiencies, work habit deficiencies, drug abuse, that we had to decide what shift are we going to make because we as a program—and at that time there were two of us teaching it—just couldn’t meet both of those needs effectively.
Emphasizing “the data,” Heather explained that such students were inappropriately placed in AVID because either they did not have a “sense of determination,” or they had other challenges that AVID could not tackle:

Heather: They were kids with serious learning disabilities, but it had just gone unidentified until we’re like looking at their work on a weekly basis, and we're like, "Hey, you're working your butt off and the light's still not going on, so you need more help than we're giving." And so, we're going through all the data, and then we're recruiting them, and then our SPED team is like, "Here come the AVID people!" And then we were also finding, too, that they didn't have the sense of determination. Because they were just like, "I'm Mexican, so I'm here." So, ok, that's not a good recruitment point. That's not the goal of our program.

As explained in Chapter 5, teachers came up with a list of criteria (Table 12) they would now use to recruit students, criteria that focused primarily on students’ “extenuating circumstances” like difficult home lives or an absent parent, along with individual traits like a “desire” and “determination” to attend a four-year university. In re-defining AVID, the teachers excluded students who were “purposely lazy,” “strongly apathetic,” or who were “demonstrating a specific learning challenge or need for learning strategies.”
Table 12. Characteristics Defining the Potential AVID Student at Lone Lake High School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Potential AVID Student Is…</th>
<th>The Potential AVID Student Is Not…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academically</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determined to succeed but struggling with obstacles outside of school.</td>
<td>A student demonstrating a specific learning challenge or need for learning strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interested in pursuing more rigorous courses and demonstrate potential if supported.</td>
<td>Purposefully lazy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desires direct instruction on high school graduation and college entrance requirements, along with college major and career planning.</td>
<td>Reactive or unwilling to grow or accept feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Socially</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wants a place to connect socially and emotionally with other students and adults.</td>
<td>Unable to interact with peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaotic family life that may impact their academic performance.</td>
<td>A strong negative influence on others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First in their family to attend a four-year college.</td>
<td>Strongly apathetic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates greater financial need than the average Lone Lake student.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The information in this chart comes from a handout that Lone Lake HS AVID teachers created for the purpose of recruiting potential AVID students. This is a partial list of characteristics students should have in order to be considered for AVID.

The practice of making “determination” or “desire” to attend college a prerequisite for admission to a college-preparatory program runs counter to the Oakes et al. (2004) framework, which advocates that all schools help build that identity among students. But teachers in several settings where AVID is marginalized or isolated expressed in various ways the notion that students should come in to AVID with a certain mindset or attitude:
Katie (Hidden Brook HS): It's like I tell my AVID kids, it's the name—"Individual Determination." You've got to come with a spark. I can't start that spark but I can fuel your fire is the analogy I give.

Michelle (Hidden Crest HS): It's predominantly Latino I'd say. So that's what we're trying to make an effort is to make it reflect the student body, so there's been discussion as to how we're going to do that, and making attempts to recruit those students who want to be in the program.

Manuel (Lone Lake HS): Well they definitely have to want to go to college. I mean that's part of our recruitment process. Not many kids say they don't want to go. A step down from that they might say they think they want to go, but they're really not sure about it. We would still take that kid. I think the determining factor is if they're determined. Are you willing to give it a shot and figure it out?

When I asked Manuel about whether students who did not grow up hearing about college from their parents would be eligible for AVID now under the new criteria, Manuel responded that it is difficult to “find” those students:

SV: Well some many of the kids at this school grow up hearing about college all their lives and so there are going to be kids at this school that don’t, that don’t grow up hearing that and may be college bound or college eligible but it may just never occur to them that they could be. So what about those kids? Do you guys reach out to them somehow? Do you hope that they find you? What does that look like?

Manuel: I think it’s a little bit of both, and that’s a really tough one. It’s one of those we talked about last time. How do you measure that? How do you identify a kid that wants to go to college but doesn’t know they want to go? You don’t have a report you can pull from, but sometimes we find them and we really don’t know how we find them.

Teachers’ decisions in this case underscore that assumptions about what student behaviors constitute “success” and “failure” and which students are appropriately categorized as academically successful are culturally mediated (Mehan, 1988) and may not change easily even when a reform like AVID is adopted. In the case of AVID at Lone Lake HS, choosing students who don’t have “learning difficulties” and who already have a college-going identity “reduces the complexity of decision making” for teachers and
“increases the likelihood that any typified decision will gloss over the needs of a particular person or situation” (Hubbard et al., 2006, p. 8). From an equity standpoint, hoping that students who might be interested in college find their way to AVID, rather than seeking out students with potential but who haven’t yet developed the habits of mind and behaviors that they’ll need once they get to college, amounts to a missed opportunity to change students’ lives. Indeed, underrepresented and low-income students depend on “regular and unobstructed opportunities for constructing instrumental relationships with institutional agents across sociocultural worlds” (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1075). Schools must take steps to make such opportunities more easily accessible, rather than waiting for students to stumble into them.

**Accounting for the Paradox: The Impact of Organizational Constraints**

The language teachers used to describe the ideal AVID student after undergoing their “re-branding” effort—language that transformed “desire” to attend college from an alterable mindset to a fixed trait—mirrors language teachers once used when justifying tracking students by ability, a grouping strategy that led to race and class separation and differences in learning opportunities for low-income and ethnic minority students (Oakes, 1992). In a three-year longitudinal case study of ten racially and socioeconomically mixed secondary schools undergoing de-tracking reform, researchers found that teachers offered several rationales for the need for tracking (Oakes et al., 1997). For example, teachers identified intelligence as innate and fixed, with some students being “bright” and others “not truly gifted” (p. 488). Further, teachers’ “beliefs that ability overlaps with race” were common, with teachers saying things like “[Native American students] don’t have the support at home, and they don’t have the ability,” or “not all kids are meant to go to
school” (p. 490). When teachers did make efforts to account for differences in learning, they would rely on “racial and cultural” explanations, saying things like “that’s the way they learn…it’s a cultural thing” when explaining differences between groups (p. 496).

Reading this stark language now, with the benefit of twenty years of hindsight and dramatic cultural shifts in how we talk about students, it can be easy to dismiss such notions as “old-school” or “out of touch.” Indeed it is thankfully no longer socially acceptable to talk about students’ intelligence in this way—it is rightly seen as reductive and racially insensitive, not to mention inaccurate. However, the underlying practice of grouping students based on assessing traits that are viewed as fixed or culturally situated remains, and emerged strongly among teachers in Lone Lake HS, a school with a strong merit-based economy of academic stratification. That this practice emerged in such a setting should not be surprising, given the difficulties even reform-minded teachers in the Oakes et al. (1997) study faced when attempting to “reconceptualize intelligence” and sustain the effort and commitment needed to deconstruct more powerful ideologies of intelligence that support tracking and ability-grouping structures, particularly when parents and others used the conventional ideologies to support the racial and cultural politics in local communities (p. 496).

For the teachers at Lone Lake HS, facing equally powerful “ideologies” that dominated the school’s culture and politics—important institutional constraints that affected their efforts to serve the underrepresented students in AVID—it was simply easier, professionally and personally, to make sense of students’ struggles by attributing them to students’ attitudes about college or individual traits of laziness or apathy, rather than probing the institutional factors that contributed to students’ circumstances. In essence, teachers chose not to “explicate the ways in which racism is operating within” their
school, directing their attention “away from systemic inequities and toward individual success and failure” (Castagno, 2008, p. 328).

Here is another missed opportunity for teachers. Had they chosen to probe institutional factors that led students to arrive in high school with little desire to go to college, they could have come up with solutions to address those factors, including some of the promising practices outlined earlier in this chapter. Further, had administrators empowered teachers to investigate institutional contributions to students’ struggles, teachers would have been in a more secure political position to follow through with that inquiry. But in this case, administrators delegated the responsibility of improving the AVID program almost entirely to the teachers, leaving them to assess the cultural and political constraints and act accordingly.

Taking an even broader organizational view, from the perspective of organizational learning, we can understand teachers’ decision to modify AVID to fit the goals of the school, rather than pushing to change the school to fit the goals of AVID, as a “single-loop” process of inquiry. Teachers identified an “error,”—that certain students in AVID were not “performing”—within the context of a school whose theory of action highly values “performance” (Argyris & Schön, 1978). Teachers may have participated in a process of inquiry to determine why students in AVID weren’t performing, attributing “error to strategies and assumptions in existing theory-in-use” (Argyris & Schön, 1978, p. 19). In their case, teachers attributed the “error” to the students themselves—they did not have “determination” or had “serious learning disabilities.” The changes they made as a result of these observations did not affect the school culture itself. Instead, the AVID program within that school changed to be more in line with the school’s theory-in-use,

Teachers could have engaged in “double-loop” learning, but that would have required them to engage in a “process of inquiry” that would put them in “conflict” with the rest of the school—administrators, other teachers, and parents. Such a process would have required teachers to resolve the inevitable conflicts by “creating new understandings” which would “become embedded in the images and maps of the organization” (Argyris & Schön, 1978, pp. 23–24). All stakeholders would have had to come together with the goal of resolving disagreements about the mission of AVID, about how resources should be distributed, and about which students should be served.

However, double-loop learning was just not likely to happen at Lone Lake HS under existing circumstances. Manuel’s comment about resistance is illustrative. It involves teachers’ attitudes toward Cornell Notes, a process for note taking that is strongly associated with AVID, as it has been a core feature of the curriculum for many years. The process emphasizes inquiry and critical thinking and teaches students how to organize their notes and how to revisit them with purpose. When students set up their note paper, they draw a line down the left third of the page, creating two sections. The left section is for questions, and the right section is for content notes. Manuel described how some teachers respond to the notes:

Manuel: Like the Cornell Notes argument. It’s like they get so—some teachers get so upset about the line and they can’t get over, like it’s so structured and you’re forcing kids to take a certain way of notes. They don’t understand I could give a crap about the lines. It’s the thinking in between the lines that’s the most important…They refuse to listen once they see the line. It’s so frustrating.
Manuel was animated in describing his frustration, a clue to me that this experience of teachers “shutting out” and “refusing to listen” is not new to him. And this is after five years of slowly, methodically building support for AVID on campus—developing a site team, changing the targeted demographic, getting buy-in from administrators and teachers—and still teachers resist.

What the Argyris and Schön (1978) model for organizational learning does not adequately account for in looking at the experiences of the teachers at Lone Lake HS is that teachers’ agency—their ability to make decisions and implement reform efforts—is “embedded in a set of power relations” (Mehan et al., 2010, p. 106). Further, “as a result of the institutional distribution and application of power, the meaning of a policy, a reform effort, or its aspects is not necessarily shared; there can be disagreement, or conflict over the meaning of actions and events and even the reform itself” (2010, pp. 109–110). Teachers at Lone Lake HS did not feel they had enough power to go up against the school, and so they made the next best logical choice that still held in place their own values of rigor and high expectations, even if they left behind the value of equity in college access. Again, teachers’ agency was somewhat circumscribed by a rigid school culture that did not hold equity as a value. Even teachers who espouse a passion for serving underrepresented and low-income students, and who have a teaching background rooted in that service, find it difficult to maintain that commitment in the face of powerful institutional constraints.

**Counteracting the Paradox: Data Use for Equity**

Another factor to consider in understanding how teachers in Lone Lake HS arrived at their decision to change the AVID mission is in how the teachers used data in
their process, for in their use of data lies some potential for counteracting the paradox in promising ways.

Creating the list of criteria detailed in Table 9 that identified students who were either “AVID” or “not AVID” falls in line with a “tracking” approach to data use that can be problematic. As Datnow and Park (2015) explain,

misinformed use of data can lead to increases in long-term tracking, which has been shown to widen the achievement gap between white students and students of color and between lower-achieving students and their higher-achieving peers (Oakes, 1985; Schofield, 2010)” (p. 52).

Choosing to focus primarily on students “in the middle” falls in line with research that has “documented that some schools devote most of their remediation efforts to students hovering near the proficiency mark: the ‘just too low’ students are considered lost causes (Boor-Jennings, 2005)” (Datnow & Park, 2015, p. 50). In some of that research, schools relied on limited benchmark assessment data in placing students in tracked content classes. In the present study, teachers relied on students’ grades and observations about their behavior to determine placement in AVID or the Academic Support class, in essence creating a new kind of tracking within a remediation setting, also based on limited data that does not take institutional factors into account.

Further, the Lone Lake HS AVID teachers focused on “deficit assumptions about students and their families,” and did not take the added step of “examining data on organizational conditions that support or hinder student performance” (Datnow & Park, 2015, p. 50). Administrators at Lone Lake HS essentially delegated the responsibility for defining AVID to the AVID teachers themselves, admitting that they did not know what to do with the program. Without guidance and support from school leaders that emphasized values of equity and diversity, without “pausing and reflecting on the data,”
teachers moved ahead. Both teachers and administrators missed a crucial opportunity for reflection that could have gone a long way toward opening up access to the college-going culture for certain students (Datnow & Park, 2015, p. 51). For as Datnow and Park (2015) argue, “when making crucial decisions that can affect students’ trajectories,” leaders must remember that “[f]inding the underlying causes of achievement patterns takes time” (Datnow & Park, 2015, p. 51).

However unwittingly, the AVID program at Lone Lake HS has thus become an institutional barrier to college access for underserved students, with the AVID teachers in essence becoming “gate-keeping” agents, rather than agents of empowerment. Stanton-Salazar (2011) describes gate-keeping agents as members of an institution who:

> whether consciously or unconsciously...are oriented toward rendering services and providing institutional support to those privileged by class or race, to those who exhibit the dominant cultural discourse (i.e. cultural capital), and to those who demonstrate institutionalized symbols of merit and ability (Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977; Conchas, 2006; Lucas, 1999, Stanton-Salazar, 1997) (p. 1077).

In modifying the AVID mission to be in line with the school’s culture—one that does not espouse values of equity and diversity in college access—the teachers’ “actions reflect an uncritical adherence to social structure and the stratification system of the institution or organization” (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1077). And by making “desire” and “determination” pre-requisites for entering AVID, teachers end up favoring students who already “demonstrate institutionalized symbols of merit and ability,” rather than empowering students who do not yet demonstrate those symbols (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1077).

What matters here is not whether the teachers are “good” or “bad,” but how they and site administrators have chosen to respond to the institutional constraints before
them. In this case, they have made the strategic decision not to resist, one that is understandable in some respects. To resist invites all sorts of consequences for institutional agents in a school setting where most incentives push toward maintaining the status quo of high attention to the most advantaged. As Stanton-Salazar (2011) argues, 

[the complexities of rigid hierarchical relationships, an emphasis on discipline and control, and latent reproductive socialization agendas within such institutions may create a culture of widespread and aggressive forms of enforcement and repression that adversely affect both eligible institutional agents and youth” (pp. 1088-1089).]

In the face of such resistance, teachers’ decision to adapt to the restrictive setting seems logical, but nonetheless troubling from the standpoint of social justice. In truth, teachers should not be put in a position to trade away certain student’s access to critical institutional supports—it is not fair to the teachers or to the students.

The solution to this dilemma is not to replace the teachers—in fact, the teachers at Lone Lake HS espouse and enact most of the critical conditions of equity and access every day. Their commitment to providing students access to rigor, college-knowledge, opportunities for leadership and empowerment, compassionate care, individualized support, and high expectations mirrors the commitment demonstrated by teachers at Hope HS where equity drives decision-making. Instead, what needs to change is the process for deciding which students have access to the institutional supports for college access at the school. Now that teachers have built a program that is respected and that has political support, they have the opportunity to initiate a conversation with school leaders, one that invites soul-searching about the school’s priorities. With guidance and support for the teachers on the ground who have the expertise and institutional knowledge to shed light on the technical, political and especially the cultural constraints
before them, leaders at Lone Lake HS could initiate organizational change that would benefit the students who need it most. As Datnow and Park (2015) argue,

> teachers’ professional judgment is an essential ingredient in data use. In the course of their work, teachers gain a wealth of knowledge about how students learn and about their life experiences…In the end, teaching is not about numbers, but about providing all students with the best education possible so they can achieve to their full potential” (p. 53).  

Rather than leaving AVID teachers to figure things out on their own—adapt or be left behind—school leaders must heed their professional judgment and engage in data use and decision-making that is “driven by the important principles of equity, reflection, and valuing student and teacher engagement” (Datnow & Park, 2015, p. 49). The stakes for underserved students are just too high otherwise.

**Implications and Final Thoughts**

This chapter began with exploring four promising practices that emerged in teachers’ enactment of the critical conditions for equity and diversity in college access, and ended by exploring the paradox created when institutional constraints prevent teachers from facilitating access to critical school resources. The findings in this study suggest several broad lessons for teachers and administrators enacting school changes geared toward ensuring equity and diversity in college access. First, the mission of “equity” must be clearly articulated and shared by all stakeholders, and it should not be so easily traded away for political expedience. Educators in high-performing suburban districts with relatively few underrepresented students especially must be willing to honestly account for their enactment of a shared value of equity, for it is not enough to simply espouse such a value. The goal of ensuring equity in college access must influence decision-making from the district office on down. Further ethnographic research in
suburban school settings grappling with maintaining a commitment to equity would help
shed light on how educators can overcome strong cultural and political barriers to
ensuring equity and diversity in college access.

Second, educators and school leaders must be willing to do the hard work of
challenging long-held beliefs and attitudes that are endemic to high-achieving school
settings. In doing so, they must find ways to marshal political support and distribute
technical resources in ways that necessarily disrupt the status quo. Such work requires
training in organizational change and school reform dynamics, for school leaders need
practical tools to initiate the difficult conversations that are required for those changes to
take place. I would suggest cross-case studies that compare how school leaders in
different types of settings account for such beliefs and attitudes when facilitating data use
among their teachers, for example, or when establishing site-based assessment goals and
targets. Such research might help administrators understand how framing such inquiry
can affect outcomes for students.

Finally, teachers on the ground working with underrepresented students in
programs like AVID must find ways to support each other, since pushing for the kind of
cultural and political shifts required to ensure equitable access to a culture of college-
going and institutional supports is risky business. Just as vulnerable students need
institutional supports to help them access critical resources, so do vulnerable teachers
who engage in practices that seek to disrupt and challenge school norms and policies.
Recognizing that such work is hard, it is also necessary, and is only going to happen when
those who are most in a position to make change are willing to do so. For as James
Baldwin concluded in his 1963 address to teachers:

[One] of the paradoxes of education [is] that precisely at the point when you begin to develop a conscience, you must find yourself at war with your society. It is your responsibility to change society if you think of yourself as an educated person.
APPENDIX A: DATA COLLECTION PROTOCOLS

Phase One: Initial Interview Questions

Introduction to participant: “Thank you for agreeing to sit down with me and discuss your teaching. The purpose of this first interview is to just get a sense of your teaching experiences generally as well as your experiences working with students who are sometimes underserved in public schools. My questions will be mostly open-ended, so feel free to add any additional insight or information as we go, and don’t hesitate to ask me any questions if you’re not sure what I’m asking. Ok, let’s begin!”

1. I’d like to start by talking about how you came to be an AVID teacher.

2. Tell me a bit about your school’s AVID program.
   a. What are the main goals of the program?
   b. Which students does your program primarily target? How does the school identify students who would be right for intervention?
   c. How are those students’ needs similar to the larger student population? How are they different from the needs of the larger student population?
   d. What kind of organization does your AVID program take? Meetings, AVID Site team (who’s on it), admin support, etc.

3. What do you see as important parts of your roles as an AVID teacher?
   a. Regarding students’ academic success?
   b. Regarding students’ emotional/social needs?
   c. Regarding AVID curriculum?

4. In general, how well do you think your school does in meeting the needs of most students on campus?
   a. Can you give me some examples of where the school [does or does not] meet the needs of students generally?
   b. Does the school have a college-going culture? Does it apply to everyone?

5. In general, how well do you think your school does in meeting the needs of the students you primarily work in AVID?
   a. Can you give me some examples of where the school [does or does not] meet AVID students’ needs?
   b. What about other teachers? Are they supportive/helpful?
   c. If you could change anything about how your school works with your AVID students what would it be?
   d. How is AVID perceived on campus? How well integrated into the school culture/planning, etc. is AVID?

6. Thinking about your everyday interactions with students, I’d like you to think about a time when you noticed or became involved with an AVID student of yours who had a question, a need or a challenge. It could be something involving
academics, social or behavioral concerns, extracurricular activities, relationships
with other adults on campus, or any other situation involving that student.

a. Story 1: First, tell me the story of what happened.
b. Second, what was the outcome of the situation? Was it resolved? If so,
   how? If it is still ongoing, what issues are still outstanding?

c. Story 2: First, tell me the story of what happened.
d. Second, what was the outcome of the situation? Was it resolved? If so,
   how? If it is still ongoing, what issues are still outstanding?

Explain process for Phase II.
Phase Two: Instructions to Teachers for Submitting Narratives

For the next two weeks, I will ask you to leave me voice messages telling me about your interactions with students. I would like you to submit three stories the first week, and three stories the second week. I am particularly interested in hearing about your interactions with students regarding:

1. A challenging or difficult concept, assignment or class, either within AVID or in another class.
2. Academic or social support, either in AVID or in another class.
3. College, preparing for college, or college-going, including conversations specific to AVID or not.

Following are instructions for how to submit your stories.

1. Find a time that is convenient for you, as close in time to the interaction as is convenient and possible. Because I will not answer the phone when you call, you can call anytime, day or night.
2. Find a location that is private, ensuring that you won’t be overheard. This could be in your classroom, your car, your home, or other private space.
3. Call the following phone number: (760) xxx-xxxx. You might want to save this phone number in a place that is easily accessible such as a contact on your cell phone.
4. When you hear the prompt, begin your message with your first name only. Say, “Hi, this is XX.” Then, tell me about the interaction you had with a student. The voice message will allow you to speak for 3 minutes.

Below is a prompt that will help you choose interactions to share:

Thinking about your everyday interactions with students, I’d like you to think about a time when you noticed or became involved with an AVID student of yours who had a question, a need or a challenge. It could be something involving academics, social or behavioral concerns, extracurricular activities, relationships with other adults on campus, or any other situation involving that student.

a. First, tell me the story of what happened. Provide as much detail as you can remember.

b. Second, what was the outcome of the situation? Was it resolved? If so, how? If it is still ongoing, what issues are still outstanding?

It might be helpful to think of how you would tell the story to a colleague—someone who may not know the student you’re working with but who generally understands the kind of teaching you do. It’s important that you don’t mention any students’ names or information that could be used to identify them.
5. When you are finished leaving the voice message, hang up. If you would like to speak more, you are welcome to call the number again and leave a second message.

If you have any questions at all regarding this project, please feel free to call me at 760-xxx-xxxx or email me at suzivans@gmail.com and I will be happy to answer any questions.

Thank you kindly for your time and assistance,

Suzanne Van Steenbergen
Phase Three: Follow-Up Interview Questions

Introduction to participant: “Thank you for sending along all those stories of your interactions with students these past few weeks. I have transcribed them all and have read through them. The purpose of our conversation today will be to talk a bit more about the narratives you provided. I’ll remind you of some of the interactions you talked about and ask you some follow up questions about them. My questions will be open-ended, so feel free to expand or add things that you think might be important or relevant. You are welcome to ask questions at any time.”

Before we get started, I’d like to first ask you to think about the stories you submitted. Were there any patterns or themes that emerged? Tell me more about that.

Individual Story Follow-Up Questions:

One of the interactions you told me about involved ___________________________________.
(____ Rigor _________ College-going ___________ Academic/Social support).

Here is what I understand happened [explain]. Was there anything that I missed?

I’m going to ask you a few questions about what happened.

1. Let’s start with an update. How does the situation stand now? Have there been any more developments since you told me about that incident?

2. Other than in your message to me, did you speak with anyone else on campus about what happened? Tell me more about that. [Probe about involvement with other staff, teachers, etc.]

3. Thinking back on what happened, how did you make the decision to [act in a certain way]? What are your feelings about that? Why did you choose x over y? Etc.

4. [If others were involved]: How well do you think [person or people from the school] handled the student’s [need, concern, question, etc.]? What are your feelings about that?

5. Thinking back to our discussion earlier of your ROLE as an AVID teacher—does this situation fall into that? How typical is it?

6. If you had all the power in the world, are there any things about how the situation with this student played out that you would change? Can you give me an example? If you are satisfied with how the situation played out, what in particular did you find worked?

Was the outcome of this situation typical at your school?
If it’s not typical, how does the outcome differ from other similar situations, in your experience?

Concluding Q’s (all interviews):

1. If someone were to come to the campus and ask you to pick out the typical AVID student, what would you say? How would you describe the typical AVID student at your school?
   
   How does that student DIFFER from the typical student at your school?

2. When you have an issue with a student, how often do you find yourself talking to someone else about the issue or reaching out to others to help solve the problem?
   a. Who do you reach out to? What does that look like?
   b. How often do you get the help you need?
   c. Who would you like to be able to reach out to, but can’t for some reason?

3. We’ve talked a lot about your work with your students. Is there anything else you’d like to tell me about how you see your ROLE as an AVID teacher?

4. We’ve talked a lot about your school’s AVID program. What role does AVID play on your campus as a whole? What role should it play, as a program?

5. Overall, how do you feel about teaching AVID at your school? What’s good about it? What would you change? Feelings? (Frustrations, institutional barriers/supports, etc.)
APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

E-mail to Site Principals

Dear Principal ______________:

I am currently a doctoral student in the Teaching and Learning program in the Department of Education Studies at UCSD. I am writing to request your help reaching out to AVID teachers at your school site, to invite them to participate in a research study I am conducting. I am interested in interviewing teachers about their experiences working within programs that provide targeted support or intervention for underrepresented students. By gaining teachers' perspectives and listening to teachers' voices, I hope to help shed light on teacher perspectives in policy debates regarding how to best support all students, both at the local and state level, and also contribute to an understanding of teachers' roles in implementing reforms in the classroom.

The teachers’ decisions to participate are completely voluntary. Individual student data or identifying information will not be collected and all responses will be kept confidential. Teachers' names, the name of your high school, or the school district will not be used in any publication or presentation. Any risk of loss of confidentiality will be minimized by using pseudonyms for all participants as well as the names of the district and school. All data will be kept in password-protected and encrypted files on password-protected computers.

If you could forward the attached e-mail [see attached] to the AVID teachers at your school site, I would very much appreciate it.

If you have any questions at all regarding this project, please feel free to call me at 760-xxx-xxxx or email me at suzivans@gmail.com and I will be happy to answer any questions.

Thank you kindly for your time and assistance,

Suzanne Van Steenbergen
Dear AVID teachers at [Name of High School]:

I am currently a doctoral student in the Teaching and Learning program in the Department of Education Studies at UCSD. I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting because you currently have at least one section of AVID as part of your teaching schedule and thus you would have valuable insight for the study. I am interested in learning about teachers’ experiences working within programs that provide targeted support or intervention for underrepresented students. By gaining teachers’ perspectives and listening to teachers’ voices, I hope to help shed light on teacher perspectives in policy debates regarding how to best support all students, both at the local and state level, and also contribute to an understanding of teachers’ roles in implementing reforms in the classroom.

The study begins with a face-to-face, audio-recorded interview in a location convenient for you, lasting about 60 minutes. Then, for the next two weeks, I will ask you to submit six brief narratives (no more than 3 minutes) to me by calling and leaving voicemails about your interactions with students during those two weeks. In the voicemail recordings you will describe briefly what happened and how you responded to the situation. During the final interview, lasting about 60 minutes, we will discuss those interactions in more detail.

Your decision to participate is completely voluntary. Individual student data or identifying information will not be collected and all responses will be kept confidential. Your name, the name of your high school, or the school district will not be used in any publication or presentation. Any risk of loss of confidentiality will be minimized by using pseudonyms for all participants as well as the names of the district and school. All data will be kept in password-protected, encrypted files on a password-protected computer.

If you are interested in participating in the study or would like to learn more about it, please call me at 760-xxx-xxxx or email me at suzivans@gmail.com and I will be happy to answer any questions and give you more information about the study.

Thank you kindly for your time,

Suzanne Van Steenbergen
REFERENCES


