

To What Extent do college programs provided at a Title I Metro-Atlanta high school advance college readiness success for underrepresented students and offer higher educational benefits to bridge students to college?

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## **I. Introduction**

When students first enter high school, teachers and counselors fuel the idea of enrolling in college-credit courses for students to succeed in getting a head start on college classes to finish college early. In light of recent years, there have been immense pressure put on high school students to succeed in their short four years of high school to participate in rigorous classes to even have a chance of getting into a top-tier college, such as Stanford, Yale, Princeton, Harvard, and etc. (Dix, 2017). There has been much confusion, disappointment, and backlash within the college admissions process for future college freshmen, because some of the previously mentioned colleges do not accept the college credits that they took in high school to be transferred to receive exemption from that course to complete college early (Kretchmar et al, 2013).

The college credit programs discussed throughout the paper are very distinctive amongst each other, but both do allow exemptions from college introductory classes. Mokher and McLendon (2009), Associate Professors of Higher Education at Florida State University and Vanderbilt University, defined dual enrollment using the U.S. Department of Education's definition as "programs [that] allow high school students to simultaneously earn credit toward a high school diploma and a postsecondary degree or certificate" (p. 257). Advanced Placement is defined as an educational program that has a range of 34 college-level exams that are equivalent to a college introductory class credit, in which colleges and universities use the student's test results to determine if they receive credit for the class or not (Rehm, 2014). One principle factor of dual enrollment is that the student has the chance to take the college courses online or on the college campus they applied to. Advanced Placement classes are taken at the high schools taught

by professionally trained high school teachers, so that the students would not have to leave campus or take online classes.

According to Rothschild (1999), a published author of journals on the American Historical Association and the College Board, the original intent for Advanced Placement was a cry for help by the American people to produce students who can take America to the next level and lead in a global society by producing more engineers, doctors, and scientists after the Cold War and the Korean War in 1950. The Ford Foundation founded and sponsored the Fund for the Advancement of Education in 1951 to promote students to take on secondary education curriculum in high school to scope out the brightest students. With much to its own dismay, Advanced Placement was becoming weakened by its own prevalence, because the expansion of the program to many schools in America caused the quality of AP to be reduced as allowing more students to be in the program counteracted with the original pilot plan to only allow students who proved to be worthy (Schneider, 2009).

Along with this notion, Dual Enrollment was implemented in high schools to align with Advanced Placement in hopes to provide educational arrangements to promote the intellectually appropriate academic engagement of high school students (A. Howley, C. Howley, M. Howley & Duncan, 2013). During the big break of Advanced Placement in the early 2000s, early college and dual enrollment options have been made accessible across the nation for the wide range of students, including minority, low-income and first-generation college students. Academic equity was a result of the introduction to early college and dual enrollment programs to minority students. The dual enrollment program introduced a new breakthrough in the American education system, which allowed students to get accustomed to the academic pressures and

social responsibilities that the students will have to face in their college life (Mokher & McLendon, 2009).

The purpose of this study is to complete a quantitative and qualitative evaluative research project administered to the AP and Dually enrolled students, school counselors, and the assistant principal in an urban neighborhood to determine which program is more valuable to Title I students that can aid future generations of students entering high school. Initially, the assumptions that come to mind is the fact that Advanced Placement is more commonly found in American high schools across the nation, so it has more value to the students and colleges, offers more benefits and flexible to the students' academic lives. To what extent is this proclamation true for all circumstances? Ultimately, the recognition of this question led to the inquiry of the research question: "AP vs. Dual Enrollment: To What Extent do college credit programs provided at a Title I high school advance college readiness success for underrepresented students and offer higher educational benefits to bridge to top colleges?"

## **II. Literature Review**

To understand the basis of this research, it is important to recognize the current climate of Advanced Placement and Dual Enrollment programs in Georgia. Kathy Cox, the Georgia State Superintendent of Schools, reports, "Georgia is a national leader in improving AP access and success...the report shows is that we have many more students who are capable of college-level work while still in high school," (GADOE, 2008). From the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2017), the number of AP tests administered in Georgia grew by 27.6% from 115,803 to 147,760 and the percentage of AP tests with passing scores in Georgia slightly increased from 54.6% to 56.4%. Compared to Dual Enrollment, 91% of high school dual enrolled students earned an A, B or C in their local or technical college courses which indicates

that nearly all were capable of successfully completing college-level coursework (Lynch & Hill, 2008). Even though Georgia has the statistics to show how increasingly trendy AP and Dual are, one should be able to delineate how the popularity of these programs should generate positive evaluative research or feedback from the students to prove that they are effective in their start to secondary education.

Due to factors such as racial and socioeconomic statuses of urban neighborhood schools, Advanced Placement does not prevail well in those low-income schools, which is why many of those schools promote Dual Enrollment to give the students a realer experience of higher education classes and the coursework that is free of charge on the student and the family. In spite of this revelation, African American and Latino/a students do, in fact, achieve better than their white counterparts.

Dr. Allison Kanny (2015), the Director of Enrollment Research and Special Projects at Loyola Marymount University, conducted a study to research the correlation between socioeconomic status and Dual Enrollment in a low-income community inside Los Angeles, and 100% of the students qualify for the free or reduced lunch program and 90% are minority students. Her study found three overarching themes of the advantages of Dual: Exposure, Learning Hidden Curriculum and Independence. Overall, it proved that Dual boosted the students' college-readiness and perceived attitudes for higher education, as many felt that Dual helped them bridge to top colleges and know the workload of a college student as underrepresented students. From this experiment, the research design used by Kanny will help this project to uncover the recurring themes in the interviews of students and counselors. One outlier of this source is that it narrowly focuses on the effectiveness of dual enrollment on a minority demographic population.

Due to racial advances in the last decades of America, many minority students have thrived on the expansion of advanced education with academic equity being more praised to offer a wide range of students with the same opportunities. The idea of invitational theory correlates well with the study conducted by Kyburg, Davis, and Callahan (2007), which coins the idea that students of diverse backgrounds will more likely to be interested in advanced education in high school with unconditional support from counselors, teachers, and administrators to advise the students of their full potential to participate in courses like Dual and AP. The study resulted in an increase of more than doubled the African Americans and Latino/a taking part in advanced courses, however, there are many anomalies where minority students who do not have the support systems of counselors and teachers to guide them to these college classes. This can leave the student to feel that they have to independently guide and discover these classes on their own, or to put these tasks on the parents to push their children to participate in these classes.

According to a study completed by Santelices and Geiser (2004), the researchers examined the number of AP classes taken by four cohorts of students in the University of California college system. The study concluded that the misleading message of AP classes fully prepares the student for college education, as it is seen as an important benefactor for college admissions. Geiser and Santelices demonstrated that the involvement in Advanced Placement classes show little to no reflection in the success of postsecondary education, which can be unfortunate for students. A similar study by Klopfenstein & Thomas (2006) found that there was no definite correlation that AP experience provides preparation for college to AP students in comparison to students who have no AP experience.

Therefore, this research inquiry will be unique in the sense that it will actively compare the two programs determining which credit course is effective for the population of Title I

students. Title I is defined by the U.S. Department of Education (2018) as a school that is “provided financial assistance to... schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards.” Previously mentioned sources regard low-income and minority students, but they do not study Title I students who generally have lower funding from the government as it is allocated to multiple schools within a state.

### **III. Methodology**

To answer whether or not the AP or Dual Enrollment classes provided at the high school are implementing college readiness into the students, the appropriate method to conduct the experiment will be a mixed method evaluation approach, which will be done by the use of interviews and surveys that were distributed to the Sophomore, Junior, and Senior population at the researched high school who have taken AP and Dual classes.

For one, the evaluation method best fits the research topic, because the goal of this experiment is to see how the AP and Dual classes provided at high school in metro-Atlanta, a low-ranking minority high school ( 70% African American, 14% Hispanic, 10% Asian, 3% White, and 1% Native American) in a large urban neighborhood where 99% of the students are economically disadvantaged and qualify for the Title I Program and Free Lunch Program, is effectively allocating college credit classes that promote college readiness to students.

Conducting the research in this school, specifically, will see whether the high school’s college classes are preparing the students to become college and career ready citizens. Surveys and interviews will help to find out, from the student perspectives, of how has the college prep classes given at the high school has: 1. Prepared the student for college or encouraged them to go to college, 2. If the student has gained any useful skills or tactics from the college credit classes

that will help them towards college, and 3. The overall passing rates and general attitudes of the classes given.

The subjects that were given the surveys were a random sample that did take AP and/ or Dual classes. A quantitative survey was more feasible for the purpose of this project to fully understand and get an accurate representations of the perspectives of the population of tenth, eleventh, and twelfth graders in AP and/ or Dual. The first feature of the experiment was not choosing to survey any freshmen, as they were not in the AP classes long enough to present quality answers or give their average exam scores. This was an important aspect of the survey to not include this population, so the results would not end up skewed by false data. Second, the survey was looked over and approved by the school principal and the test subjects were given information about the survey's anonymity that answers were confidential. The students that were sent the survey are the school's Magnet program, sophomores and juniors, where all the students take at least 1-4 AP classes each year and given the choice of doing Dual during the summer or during the school year. The general population of the students were sent the survey information via Google Classroom, E-mail, and Text, because the survey was a Google Form and everyone in the school can access the survey with their provided school Google Gmail account. The survey information was only sent to AP teachers and the Beta Club sponsor, as for most of the club members took Dual or AP classes.

The subjects that participated in the qualitative interviews were students that have taken/ are taking AP and Dual classes, counselors from the high school, and the assistant principal. The addition of interviews with surveys will help focus deeply into the differing perspectives of the inquiry, as the interview answers will help me find common themes amongst the subjects to create an accurate conclusion and quality results. The interviews will allow to access more



descriptive answers that would not be received from the online survey, because the survey was focused more on the quantitative data rather than qualitative. The goal of each interview conducted was to comprehend the basis of each perspective that was questioned, and to distinguish the reasons why the students feel that either class was more beneficial or see why the school administrators choose to advise students to either program based on their background as a counselor. All of the interviewees were asked open-ended questions to have answers that reflected their knowledge and opinions. For the student interviews, seven questions were asked to demonstrate the demographic themes, such as race, grade, socio-economic status, and parental college background. Then, the questions from 8-14 regarded the information on the attitudes toward AP vs Dual Enrollment dealing with the flexibility, beneficial advances, and financial considerations that all go into the decisions of participating in either course. For the school counselor interviews, the questions mostly focused on the stances of which program did the counselor feel would gain the most benefits not only to make it easier on the students, but also what the counselor felt would help pay off more in college as later on they will need to be able to handle rigorous coursework. Other questions that were asked considered the drawbacks that could potentially hinder the student from college readiness or gaining credit and if they feel that the classes provided at the school do advance college readiness.

#### **IV. Results and Findings**

On the survey, the students were asked many demographic questions, for example: “What is your Race or Ethnicity?”, “What is your sex?” and “Are you an immigrant from a foreign country?”. These question will help with underlying factors/ themes that can lead me to a layered conclusion. Students were asked short answer questions like, “In what way did your parents encourage you? If you said "No", explain how you self-motivated yourself and why?” and “Out

of the college credit classes you have taken so far, which ones do you think has prepared you for college and why? If not, explain why.”, to share their honest opinions to these questions. Then, students were asked, “Do you feel that your Dual/ AP class was easy or hard concerning the rigor and overall feeling of the class?”, “How was the workload of the Dual classes you have/ are taking?”, and “Do you think the college credit classes provided at “designated high school”, specifically, has prepared you for college?”. They were asked to rate their answers on a scale from 1 to 5 with 1 being the lowest rating and 5 being the highest rating. Also, the students were asked a multitude of yes or no questions, for instance, “Will you use the skills you learned in your AP or Dual class in college in the future?” and “After completing a college credit class at “designated high school”, did it affect your view or decisions on applying for college?”. These questions were all used to find relationships in external factors, like parents, and other factors, like the rigor or the amount of stress, will have on the choice of underrepresented students to take these college classes to find patterns in this research.

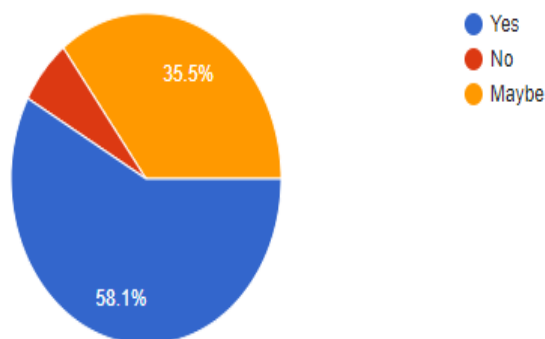
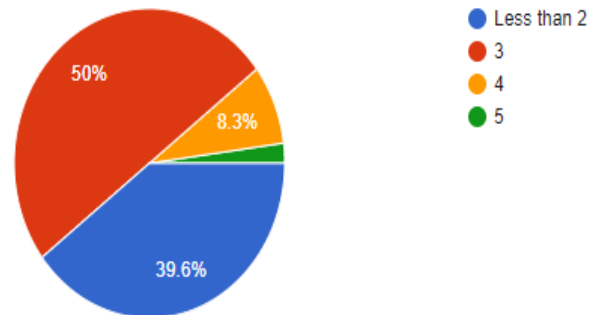


Figure 1. “Will you use the skills you learned in your AP or Dual class in college in the future? (i.e. writing skills, math skills)”

Out of 62 responses for this question, almost 60% of student agreed that the skills learned in the designated AP or Dual class would carry on into the future when they are in college. On that note, we can see that in some way the experience of being in a college credit class will aid

Title I students in college. Seven percent of student said “No” to this question, considering that the skills learned will not help them or will not be used in the future.

Figure 2. “What was the AVERAGE AP exam score you have received?”



Thirty-one students reported that they have received an average AP exam score of 3. When reviewing this statistic, many colleges will likely not accept a 3 from a AP exam to exempt a college introductory class. Only ten percent of the students received an average score of 4 or 5 on the exams, which gives these students a better chance to get exemptions. One element that was often explained in the survey open-ended questions was the fact that many AP teachers in the Title I school were not effective to the learning styles of the student. Due to low funding, the AP program tends to not be a high-achieving feature of the school causing low success on AP exams.

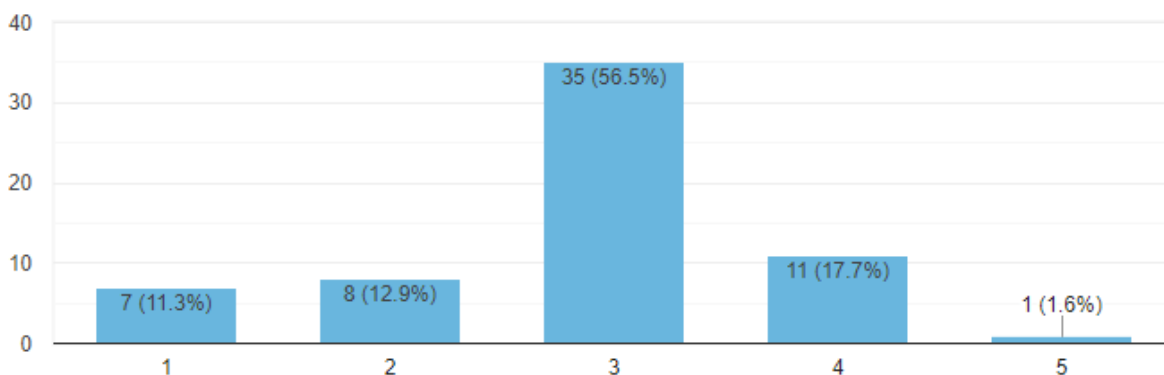


Figure 3. Do you think the college credit classes provided at the “designated high school”, specifically, has prepared you for college?

For this question, the actual high school name was used on the survey in replace of “designated high school”, but for the purpose of this paper the school will remain unknown. Since this project is researching the effectiveness of college credit and bridging Title I students to top colleges, this question needed to be asked in order to understand the quantitative number of students who feel prepared. Only 60% of out of 62 respondents felt neutral about being prepared for college, with more people strongly disagreeing or somewhat disagreeing (1-2) on the scale. This means that the classes provided by the school does not effectively prepare their students.

After conducting interviews with the school’s AP and Dually enrolled students, the students displayed five consistent themes throughout their interviews, as shown below.

Table 1. Themes

Theme	Explanation
Flexibility	Flexibility when it comes how many classes they partake in daily, personal schedule selection, and preparedness for class (syllabi).
Experience	Experiences on a real college campus, interacting with professors, and getting a beforehand involvement on the expectations are for college.
Parental Motivation/ Background	How the educational background of the student’s parents affected the motivational support they received into taking these classes.
Coursework	The considerations of how hard or easy the rigor and coursework has on the student’s academic life, and whether the work aided in college readiness.
Fiscal Implications	The factor of money played a role into the choice of the students and their parents.

These five themes played significant roles into the lives of the students, the goal of providing college readiness to the students, and choosing which program was better for them based on life consultations. Table 1 shows the five themes that were most apparent and deliberated by every student interviewed, and the meaning of the theme to help put the themes into context for analysis.

The hypothesis of this project was that Advanced Placement has a superior placement above dual enrollment as it would ultimately be more effective and beneficial for the students. For this reason, AP is more commonly found around America in high schools and has 34 college-level exams that offers universal exemptions from classes (if you receive a score that is required by the college of interest). The results were what was expected for dual enrollment to be a better choice for Title I students, because it offers a unique experience for students to be on the college campus, the students get to learn about the coursework and “hidden curriculum”, and the classes for dual are said to be more flexible to the perspective schedules.

## **V. Summary and Discussions**

This section of the research paper is discussing the thematic analysis of the top recurring themes in the interviews, as well as commonalities between the interviews and other sources from the Literature Review. Along with this section, the limitations and challenges are explained to understand the results of the experiment. The problem of the research was that AP and Dual Enrollment performance and pass rates at the designated Title I high school were very low, so the researcher wanted to further investigate the connection of the school being Title I and the effect on student performance. This insight led me to develop the research question for the project, “To What Extent do college programs provided at a Title I Metro-Atlanta high school

advance college readiness success for underrepresented students and offer higher educational benefits to bridge students to college?”

The three recurring themes for analysis in this report are: Flexibility, Experience, and Coursework.

### ***Theme 1: Flexibility***

Flexibility, in this context, will touch on the how many classes they partake in daily, personal schedule selection, and preparedness for class. This was the top theme that was explained by all the students, when comparing the two programs. The Dual Enrollment students explained that their courses ranged from 2-3 times a week with 1-4 classes a day with the flexible schedule, which acts like a real college schedule, was a great deal compared to a 5 times a week with 7 classes a day high school schedule. As one Asian female student states, “You can create your own schedule. You can leave room in your schedule to go home eat, leave campus or even take a breather. Instead of sitting through 7 classes every day, you could just have 1-4 classes or no classes a day. This allows you to manage your time better to complete your assignments and attend extracurricular activities with less stress.”

Other students mentioned the syllabus that is provided by college professors to give an outline for a full semester of coursework to know what to expect. By doing this, they felt a weight lifted off of them, since they did not have prepare for the worst. The syllabus added a more professional touch to the class and made it flexible for students to study on time and plan out the assignments beforehand. A Hispanic male student praised, “Dual classes had a syllabus which helped him be more organized and prepare for the class better than AP, which does not have a syllabus. In AP, I was more stressed, because teachers would suddenly give quizzes or

tests, so he feels that Dual is more flexible in the sense that it is not flexible because he knows what is coming up and what he is going to be tested on so he can prepare.”

### ***Theme 2: Experience***

Dual offers the advantage for students to take their college classes on the designated college campus, which most students feel that gives them legitimate college experience. Dual students have access to what college will be like from interacting with professors to creating their own flexible schedules and getting a glimpse of what the material will be like when they are real college students. After interviewing the students, the experience received from Dual was more “real” while the experience from AP will be expected to help you deal with the amounts of work you will get. “Dual helped me get a feel of college life. The work in college is different than high school and Dual gives me that experience and what to expect. AP classes are more rigorous, so when I get to college it will be more of a breeze because I am already used to the high amount of work.” implied by a Hispanic female student. The combination of both programs helped the interviewed students handle coursework and get the advantage they need as Title I students.

Three African American students that were interviewed felt that what they are experiencing in Dual classes was more professional compared to their past AP classes as a male student explained, “Dual classes were fairly easier than AP because the teachers are trying to teach college classes without the title of a college professor. They are not professors or doctors and they are placed in the AP class to teach it with annual training and it is not effective. Compared to professor that know what he is has a better connection with students and know how to teach the proper curriculum that they need to know by the time you leave.” This recurring idea was felt by two more female students who expressed the idea that the teachers at the high school

and their methods are not effective for the students to retain the information. Although one student took her Dual classes online, she retained much more information from there than an actual AP teacher provided at the school. Moreover, the theme of experience contributed to a student's feelings towards a programs as the AP teachers provided at the school were not effective to the point where they could succeed on the AP exams, but were more comfortable passing a DE class and earning credit that way.

### ***Theme 3: Coursework***

As stated in Table 1, Coursework will be examined as the considerations of how hard or easy the rigor and coursework has on the student's academic life, and whether the work aided in college readiness. All twenty of the students agreed upon the fact that Dual was easier and AP was more rigorous and hard. This theme outlined how dual participation gave students the chance to advance and learn "the hidden curriculum" or realizing what independent skills and habits that are expected of them when they are supposed to be treated like college students, and this leads to future confidence for academic success in college (Kanny, 2015). A Hispanic female student advocated that, "In AP, they treat you like you are still in high school when they are supposed to treat you like college students. With Dual, it is like do you what you want to do because your learning is completely up to you and trains to be more active and speak up for yourself when you do not understand or need to talk to your professor."

Another student had a similar account elaborating that, "Furthermore, in AP classes, teachers honestly are there every step of the way to guide us. They gave me everything I needed one by one while continuously reminding me the due dates and will always try to explain something again and again if I didn't understand it the other times. In DE, professors really give you a list of what you'll do over the semester, and that's that. You self-guide yourself in a way.



Professors are not here to “baby” us anymore. They won’t constantly remind you of deadlines.”

The twenty students perceived that they were all independent with the skills they built up from AP, which aided in their success for the DE classes. The lack of close supervision from AP teachers in dual enrollment classes strengthened the independence skills of the students to create their success.

For this project, the researcher had encountered many challenges and limitations in the research process. For one, it was difficult trying to set up interviews and have access to AP seniors and full-time Dual students, as the schedules were conflicting, in the context of trying to set up face to face interviews. A way to solve this was phone interviews as it proved to be easier and efficient on both ends. Another challenge was trying to get seniors to participate in the survey, as most of the senior who did take AP classes were full-time Dual students, but there was a feasible population of seniors in the school to complete the survey. The surveys were not administered to freshmen, as the freshmen who partook in AP classes would not enter accurate data (i.e. exam scores) for they have yet to finish out the course. For the interviews, the only students that were considered for interviews were those who experienced both AP and Dual Enrollment to make the interviews have personal opinions on both programs. Choosing not to interview just an AP student or just a Dual student would make the interviews less biased and one-sided.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Based on the results, it can be said that the initial hypothesis was proven to be wrong. Dual Enrollment, even though is not prevalent in American high schools, is found to be more effective when Title I students move onto postsecondary education. This means that AP classes are reported to be ineffective to Title I students on the base of college preparedness, for the fact

that many students do not receive a unique college experience nor will they understand the responsibilities of an actual college student, while in high school. Additionally, the AP classes are taught on the high school campus by high school teachers. Many interviewees felt more mature for this environment and wanted to venture out of high school, in order to get a free and feasible experience.

More research on Title I schools with a majority minority population needs to be further researched with regards to success in college credit programs compared to non-Title I schools. It is possible for these school to advance the students, if it is not for the disproportionate levels of funding allocating to the schools in the area. Not only should research be done on the high school level, but there should be a more focused view on the elementary and middle school levels, as this is where foundational academic skills are put into place to garner future success in school. This is important, because many students in the Metro- Atlanta high school are often passed onto the next grade and are learning high school content with a reading comprehension level that is 2-3 grades below them. This will result in the student falling short on End of Course exams and to continually make up the courses. Title I students have relatively low numbers of students who pass the AP exam (with a 3 or more), and this is due to not having a foundational skill set from middle and elementary school.

This conclusion has three future implications for the continuance of Advanced Placement and Dual Enrollment in Title I schools. To begin, dual can increase the number of Title I students going to college. As stated previously, dual allows students to work on a college campus, so these students get to take a “test run” of college without paying for the classes. This creates a positive impression from the students as they realize college is “flexible” and “freeing”, so the dual experience is one to increase the number of Title I students going to college. Second, the

increased amounts of money being put towards AP classes and teachers will reciprocate into Title I student success. Lastly, Dual provides better skills and compromises of earning credit, which causes higher pass rates of Dual and earning college credit for students.

Moreover, future steps could be concentrated on the differences in a Title I school and non- Title I school on AP and Dual success and the levels of funding. This project could even be extended to a deeper look on the elementary school lesson plans and the teaching of skills that differ between Title I and non-Title I. Another direction to go into would be to research college students who took AP and Dual classes to see which one weighs more in influence in their secondary educational life. These future projects could close gaps and questions as to why minorities and whites excel differently in school.

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