



# Impact of Social Factors and Dynamics on the Achievement Gap in PAUSD

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## INTRODUCTION

The achievement gap is an issue in the US, especially at majority white and Asian schools (such as PAUSD). Although there are many academic factors that contribute to the achievement gap, such as the availability of resources, there are also **social factors** that contribute to the achievement gap. Dynamics between students of different races, how teachers address racism in class, and systemic racism playing a role in public schools such as PAUSD. (Anderson, 2016)

**Race based stressors**, such as perceived discrimination or stereotype threat (where people are stressed that they need to perform well so that they do not fit into the negative stereotype of their racial group), have a psychological response. They increase levels of cortisol, a steroid hormone that elevates when the body is stressed. (Adams, 2016) When levels of this hormone are increased, it can cause loss in motivation, concentration, weaker memory, and weaken performance.

### Research Question

Which social factors affect the achievement gap in PAUSD, and how can interviews with teachers and administrators help design a retreat for Paly students where particular social issues that affect the achievement gap are discussed?

PAUSD students (K-12) Meeting Standards in Math, 2017

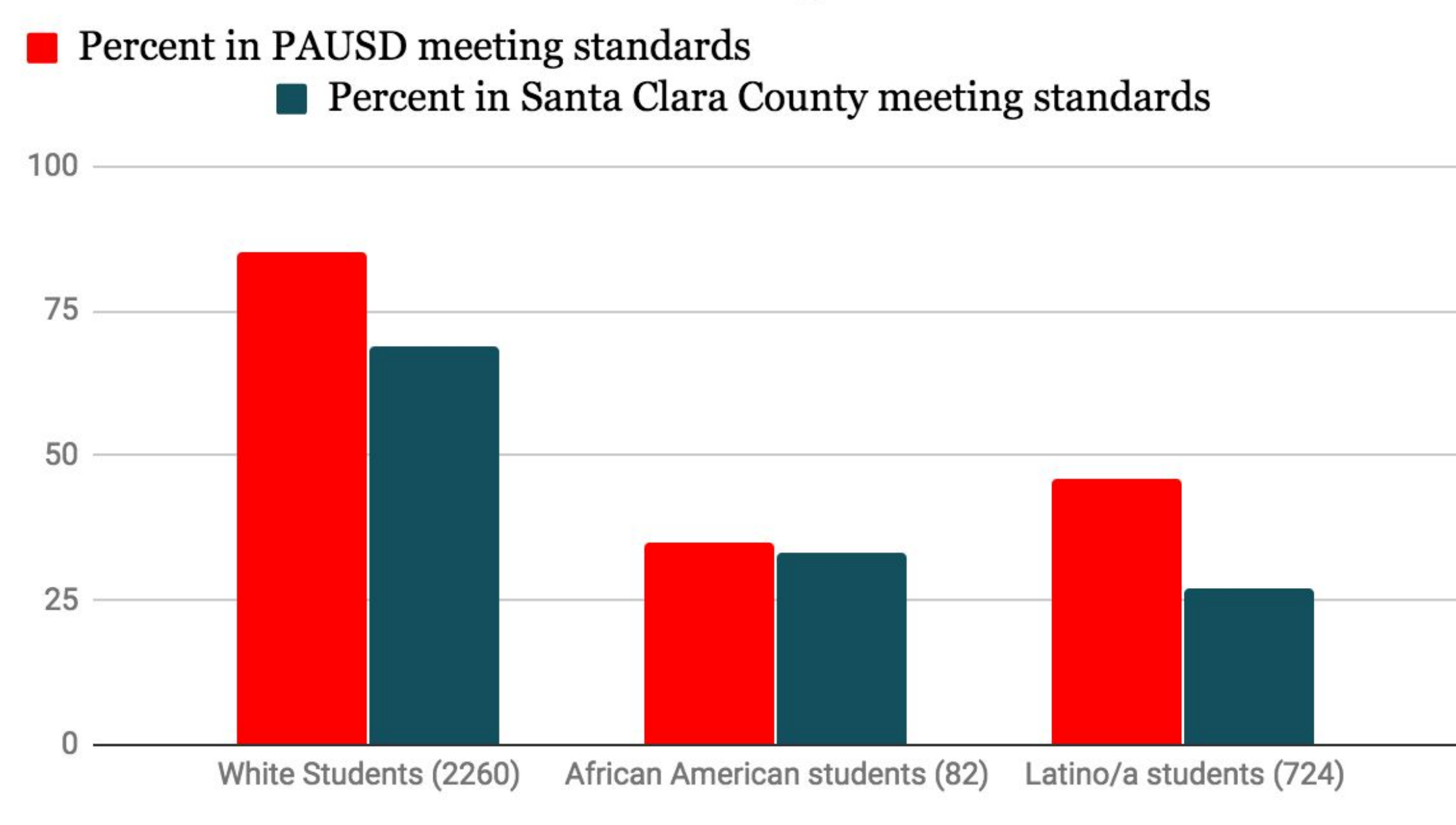
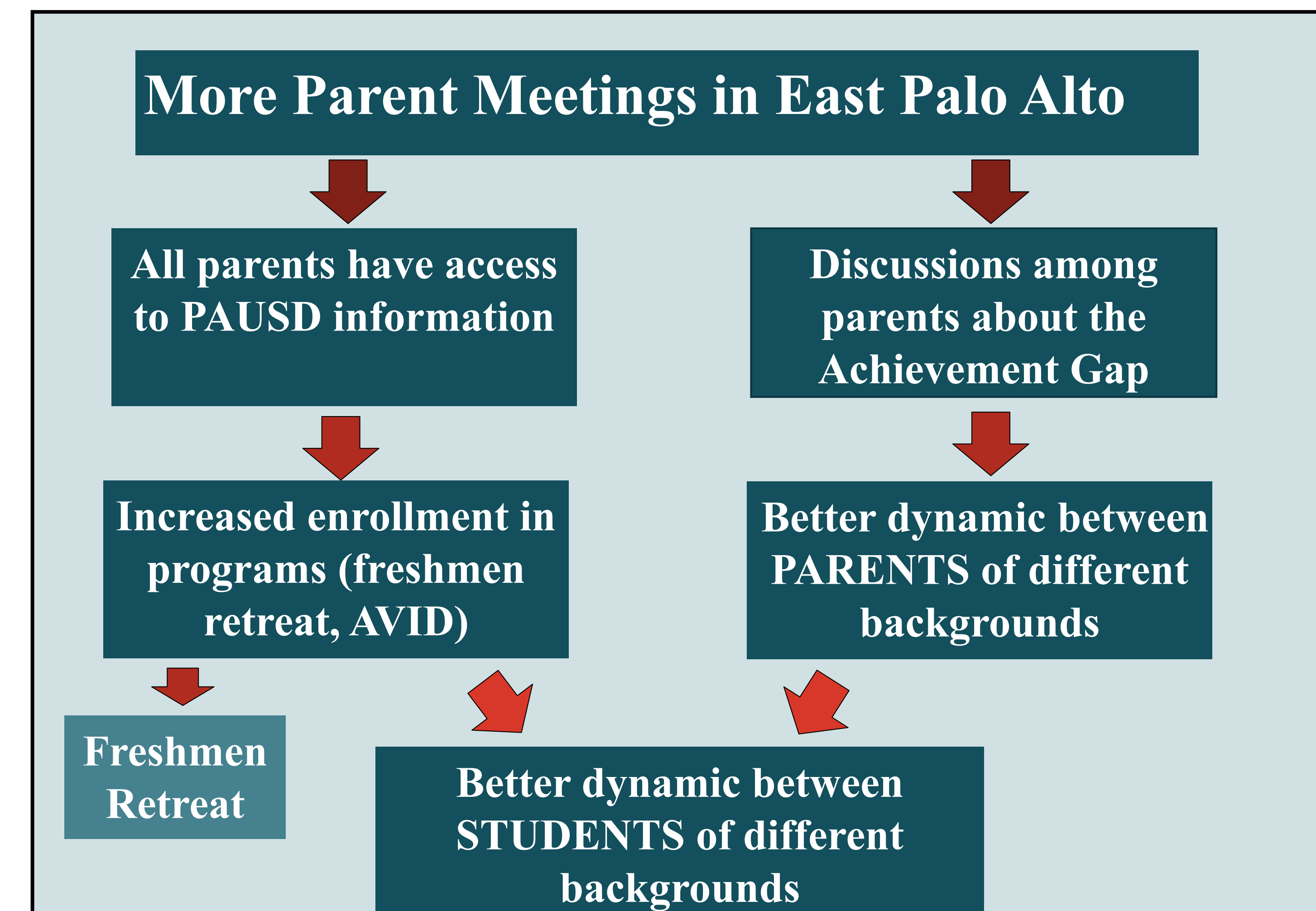


Fig 1: PAUSD CAASPP test results 2017 (Kolar, 2017)

## DATA AND FINDINGS

THEME	INTERVIEW #1	INTERVIEW #2
<b>Social Dynamics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At lunch and in classes, kids sit with people who look like them</li> <li>Tension between students from Palo Alto and from East Palo Alto</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Stereotype threat:</b> Challenging to walk into a room and be the only minority; people feel judged</li> <li>A false stereotype about AVID discourages students from participating</li> </ul>
<b>Proactive Programs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>MATE</b> (Minority achievement task force)</li> <li>Programs should start before students reach high school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Junior rise up:</b> College admission prep course</li> <li><b>AVID:</b> Most are the first in their family to go to college</li> <li><b>Summer bridge program:</b> Transition between 8th and 9th grade</li> </ul>
<b>Different Student Expectations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Honors and AP lanes are majority white and Asian students</li> <li>Minority students in AP classes questioned for being there</li> <li>Many minority students not given message that college is an achievable option.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some teachers have different standards for different students               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Example: A "B" is "good enough" for minority students, but not for white and Asian students</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Teacher Knowledge about Achievement Gap</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers are concerned, but they do not know what to do</li> <li>Some teachers do not see the achievement gap as a structural issue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PAUSD should recruit a more diverse group of teachers</li> <li>Teachers might not understand their own internal bias</li> <li>"The commitment or knowledge about the achievement gap really depends on the experiences you've had with students"</li> </ul>
<b>Lack of Minority Voices Being Heard</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"This is really complex, because this district works for who it was designed to work for....Who was this district designed for, and what was the original thinking, and whose story is that to tell."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is hard for minority students to not see people like them in positions of power</li> <li>Importance of mentorship</li> </ul>

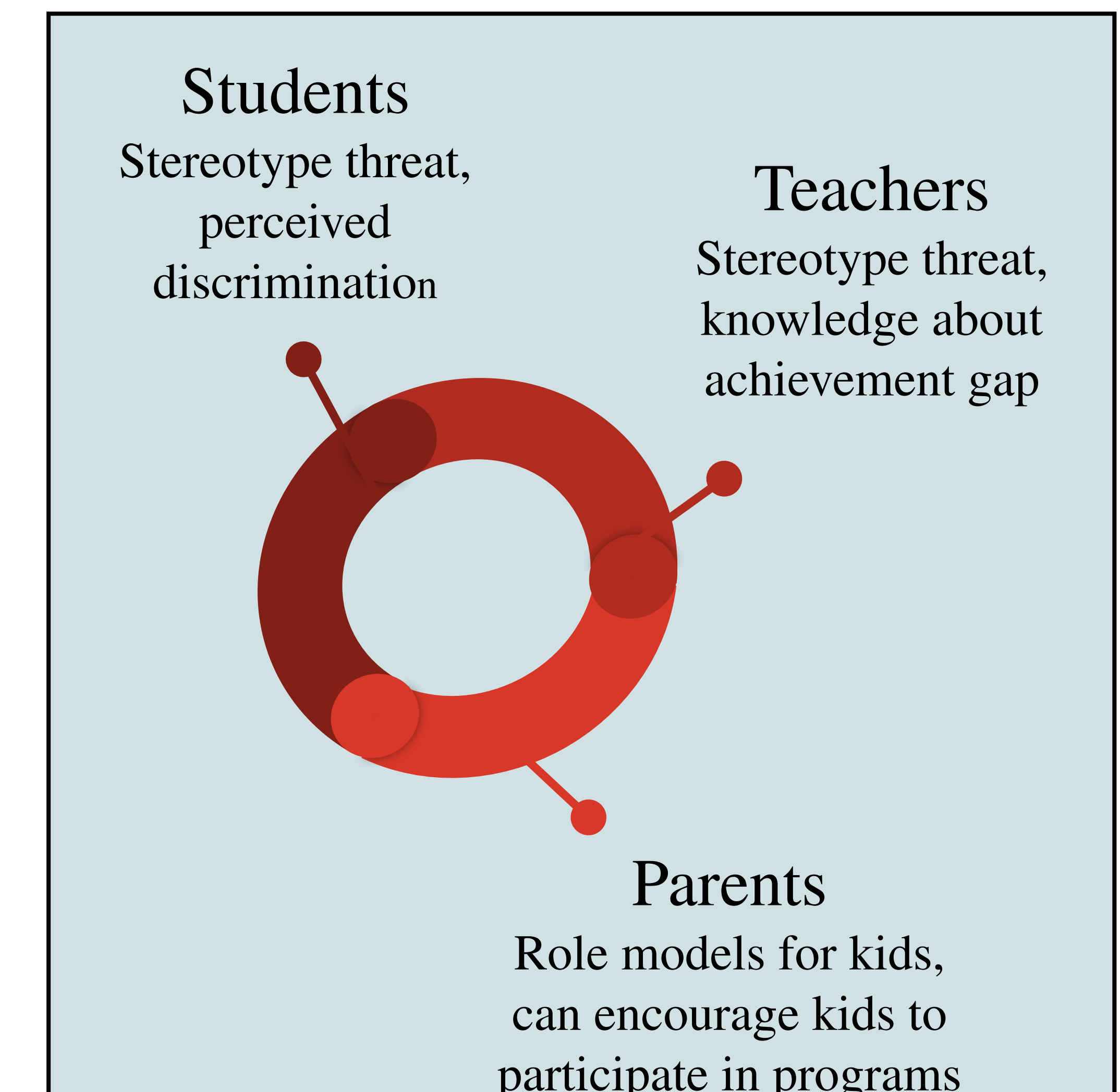
## CONCLUSIONS AND ANALYSIS



Both interviews indicated that stereotype threat may impact a student's academic choices. For example, a student might chose to not take an AP class because it is hard being often times the only minority in the room, and be questioned by the teacher if they are actually supposed to be in that class. Improving social dynamics between students of different races may help diminish stereotype threat and other factors that lead to the achievement gap.

The interviews also indicated that parent involvement and collaboration has an effect on student's social dynamics and academic success. Meetings can be used as a catalyst for further change regarding the achievement gap→ could lead to conversations about the achievement gap

## IMPLICATIONS AND NEXT STEPS



Because there are multiple social factors that impact the achievement gap, not just the way students interact with each other, there should be efforts made to address factors such as parent involvement and teacher knowledge about the achievement gap.

- Teachers→hiring a diverse group of teachers
- Parents→more parent meetings specifically about the achievement gap
- Students →freshmen retreat

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

Interviewees were asked to share personal stories, insight, and beliefs regarding social factors that contribute to the achievement gap in PAUSD

**Original Goal:** Use data to help present a proposal for a retreat for Paly freshmen

**Revised Goal:** Present a proposal for more parent meetings in EPA, and work with a teacher to help design activities for the freshman retreat



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS / REFERENCES

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