

Research Brief

AP Courses

Question: What are ways to encourage minority students and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds to take and succeed in AP classes?

Summary of Findings:

Advanced Placement courses and their final national standardized exams began in 1954 to help students, mostly white males, get through college more quickly so that they would have more time in the work force (*Surviving a mid-life crisis*). 50 years later, these courses and subsequent test results are being used to gain entrance into college. One research study found that high school seniors who took no AP courses, graduated from college at a rate of only 33% by age 30 (*Dispelling the culture of mediocrity*). Other studies have found that just being in an AP class without taking the exam and/or not passing with a 3 or higher, do not have the same benefits as passing the exam. By passing the exam, the chances of completing college and receiving a degree are greatly increased. In 2004, 1/4 of public high school graduates had taken 1 AP class, out of which 1/5 had taken the exam and only 13% passed it. In an extensive study that examined high impact (defined as having the majority of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and a large minority population) and average impact (defined as having the majority of students from the middle class) schools, it was found that one of the goals in the high impact schools was to prepare students for the world after college graduation, whereas in the average impact schools, the goal was to get them to graduate high school and enroll in college (*Gaining traction, gaining ground*).

Currently, there is a push to offer more AP courses and encourage more minority students and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds to take them. As of 2004, 6 percent of the 13.2 percent African-American students took an exam, American Indians represented 0.5 percent while they make up 1.1 percent of the student population, Latino students comprise 12.8 percent of the population but 13.1 percent of them took an exam, 10.6 percent of Asian students who represent 5.1 percent of the students completed the test, and white students make up 67.5 percent of the students out of which 64.5 percent took the assessment (*Advanced Placement participation grows*). "...It's also important to be aware that parents of low-

income and minority students generally trust school officials with the academic future of their children” (*Challenging students to achieve*).

Issues surrounding offering more courses include:

1. Will the courses need to be watered down to accommodate more students?
2. Are there enough students to justify the time and expense of offering additional courses?
3. If students are not achieving in average level courses, how will they ever be able to function and achieve in a college level class?
4. Are there enough resources including trained teachers, to support additional courses?

Based on interviews with high school students who did not take AP courses, the common reasons given were: 1) Course(s) were not offered, 2) The school was very selective, 3) The student thinks they might fail or not do well, and/or 4) Their friends were not taking AP classes.

Although the AP courses are highly structured and there is a tremendous amount of material to cover and skills to teach, the courses do provide an introduction of what academic life is like in college. For many students who may not have thought that college was an option for them, they discover they can do well and like the intellectual stimulation. More schools are offering more AP courses and are reaching out to and attracting students who traditionally have not taken these classes. Two common themes in schools where more of the underrepresented populations were taking courses were: there was a strong message that failure was not an option and students could and would succeed beyond college; and high expectations for every student were expressed and modeled by all.

Things being done to encourage and support more student enrollment in AP courses:

- Open courses to anyone who wants to take them
- Attend mandatory tutoring before or after school and/or on Saturdays if the student’s grade falls to a C or C-
- Use student data to help them address areas of weaknesses and strengths and design a plan to develop both
- Help students develop a 4 year plan that pushes them forward and does not allow them to coast
- Work with parents to help them understand the purposes of the courses and gain their support

- Work with middle schools to determine necessary support and guidance
- Offer summer school to help those who need more foundation in a content area and push those who are ready to be more challenged
- Use Freshman Academies for students whose eighth grade test scores are low so that they are given a double dose of the content they need to strengthen
- Encourage every student to take at least one AP class
- Offer college bound (AP courses) or work place courses. Do not offer remedial courses
- Spend more time reading and writing across all the content areas
- Provide additional support for teachers and students, such as extra time to study, financial incentives, help offset the cost of the test, etc.
- Provide access to on-line AP courses

Online Resources:

- Advanced Placement courses cast wider net
Reasons for offering more AP courses along with some brief descriptions of programs that are expanding are provided in this article.
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2004/11/03/10ap.h24.html?print=1>
- Advanced Placement participation grows
An overview of the stats for the AP exam for the past five years is presented in this piece.
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/02/02/21ap.h24.html?print=1>
- Advanced Placement report to the nation, 2006
A report on the results of the Advanced Placement program and exam are presented in this article.
http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/about/news_info/ap/2006/2006_ap-report-nation.pdf
- African American achievement in America
This is a brief synopsis of the achievements of African American students in America.

http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/9AB4AC88-7301-43FF-81A3-EB94807B917F/0/AfAmer_Achivement.pdf

- Challenging students to achieve
Some ideas and ways that schools can challenge students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and minorities are provided in this piece.
http://www.principals.org/s_nassp/bin.asp?TrackID=C7C5ULWDDBYT8Y2A7HNTMYA2GZRGAPCP&SID=1&DID=46840&CID=465&VID=2&DOC=FILE.PDF
- Dispelling the culture of mediocrity: Expanding Advanced Placement
“This booklet describes the need to expand advanced placement programs and gives some examples of programs...”
http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2/content_storage_01/0000000b/80/22/ba/2b.pdf
- Gaining traction, gaining ground
An extensive summary of research done at high and average impact schools and the results are presented in this report. Also included are in-depth descriptions of the programs at high impact schools.
<http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/6226B581-83C3-4447-9CE7-31C5694B9EF6/0/GainingTractionGainingGround.pdf>
- Get their attention
Some methodologies for reaching lower level students are provided in this article.
http://www.principals.org/s_nassp/bin.asp?TrackID=C7C5ULWDDBYT8Y2A7HNTMYA2GZRGAPCP&SID=1&DID=46975&CID=481&VID=2&DOC=FILE.PDF
- Higher proportion of seniors mastering AP
This is an overview of the passing rates for the AP exams for the past 5 years.
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2006/02/15/23ap.h25.html?qs=AP&print=1>
- High school reform

This is a brief summary of two reports on high school reform.

<http://www.districtadministration.com/page.cfm?p=1466>

- **Latino achievement in America**
This is a brief overview of the academic achievement levels of Latino students in America.
<http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/7DC36C7E-EBBE-43BB-8392-CDC618E1F762/0/LatAchievEnglish.pdf>
- **On course for success**
A booklet that provides reasons why high school students, especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds and who are minorities, need to take rigorous courses and descriptions of programs are provided.
http://www.act.org/path/policy/pdf/success_report.pdf
- **On dropping AP courses**
This was written by an administrator of a prep school that chose to drop AP classes. The author cites reasons and rationale for this decision.
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/01/05/16achieve.h24.html?print=1>
- **On the right track**
Course syllabi for AP courses in English, math, and science are provided in this piece.
<http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/041B7B1D-FF15-4C6A-A3E4-01350F56D92A/0/OnCourseFullBook.pdf>
- **Report: High schools must demand more**
Reasons for high schools to provide demanding curricula are given in this article.
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2005/01/05/16achieve.h24.html?print=1>
- **Schools build cultures of excellence**

A description of a high school in Southern California that raised the number of Hispanic students taking AP classes is provided in this article along with a brief synopsis of Gaining Traction, Gaining Ground and The Power to Change.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/1208/p14s02-legn.html>

- Surviving a midlife crisis: Advanced Placement turns fifty
An overview of the origins of the AP test and how it's changed since its inception are described in this piece.
<http://www.educationnext.org/20061/pdf/34.pdf>
- The power to change
This article provides overviews, philosophies and descriptions of three schools with at risk populations that are succeeding.
<http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/012DC865-97CA-4C2F-8A04-9924E2F392F0/0/ThePowerToChange.pdf>
- What makes a high school great?
A description of Newsweek's considerations for inclusion on their best high schools list.
<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/12532668/site/newsweek/>
- Why AP matters
This is a description of how schools were viewed in regard to their AP course offerings and their inclusion on Newsweek's top schools in the nation, 2006.
<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/12535969/site/newsweek/from/RSS/>

Conference

- AP annual conference info
July 12-July 16, 2006 in Lake Buena Vista, FL
<http://collegeboard.com/apac/2006/index.html>

Programs

- Apex Learning, Inc.
On-line AP courses are offered. Schools for whom there are not enough students to hold an AP course, can take courses on-line.

<http://www.apexlearning.com/>

- College Now
“College Now is a program for New York City public high school students that is run by the City University of New York (CUNY) and the Department of Education. Most students who enroll in the CUNY colleges graduate from New York City high schools, so the idea behind the program is to give students a head start on the transition between high school and college. That might mean taking a college class and banking the credit even though you're still in high school. Or it might mean taking courses to help you improve your reading, writing, and math so that college classes will be easier once you get there. Or it may simply mean attending an event on a college campus so that you can meet students and professors and get a taste of what college life is all about. College Now is a program for New York City public high school students that is run by the City University of New York (CUNY) and the Department of Education. Most students who enroll in the CUNY colleges graduate from New York City high schools, so the idea behind the program is to give students a head start on the transition between high school and college. That might mean taking a college class and banking the credit even though you're still in high school. Or it might mean taking courses to help you improve your reading, writing, and math so that college classes will be easier once you get there. Or it may simply mean attending an event on a college campus so that you can meet students and professors and get a taste of what college life is all about.”

<http://www.collegenow.cuny.edu/students/index.html>

- Syracuse University Project Advance
“Syracuse University Project Advance is a partnership linking **Syracuse University** with secondary schools. Through this partnership, high schools offer qualified seniors the opportunity to enroll in Syracuse University courses for credit. Courses are offered in high school classrooms during the regular school day. They are taught by high school teachers who have completed graduate seminars in their subject areas and been named adjunct instructors at SU.”

<http://supa.syr.edu/about/index.html>

- UC College Prep (UCCP)
AP courses are offered via distance learning through The University of California, Santa Cruz. Low-income and English language learners are given priority.
<http://www.uccp.org/>

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