

# Communication PRinciples for Principals

SEPTEMBER 2010

## GETTING STUDENTS TO ENROLL IN AP COURSES



### IDEA

Recognize current AP students for their accomplishments to raise academic expectations and standards, improve morale, attract new students to AP and publicize the school and the program to the overall community.

### Getting Students to Enroll in AP Courses

Over the past few years, educators in the United States have seen a steady increase in the number of students that are enrolling in Advanced Placement courses, but as more students enroll in these classes an alarming number of students are taking the AP exam and failing it or choosing to opt out of it all together. (See: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/11/education/11college.htm>)

According to the College Board's annual AP Report to the Nation, approximately 800,000 public high school seniors in the graduating class of 2009 (26.5 percent) took an A.P. exam at some point in their high school career. Nearly twice as many took the exam in 2001. Of the 798,629 students that took 2,312,002 exams in 2009, 15.9 percent passed the exam with a 3 or better. This is a significant decrease compared to 2001 where 1,414,387 exams were taken by 844,741 students and 61.9 percent of students passed with a 3 or better. (See: [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com))

Enrollment is rising in many AP classes across the country but at the same time the failure rate is increasing as more students enroll in AP classes who may not be prepared to take AP classes. (See: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/11/education/11college.htm>)

This tip sheet will provide some helpful ideas to encourage hesitant students to consider taking an AP course and to take the end-of-course AP exams.

### Of Note:

The following information is for the United States in general and is not DoDEA specific.

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#### DoDEA HQ Communications Office

4040 North Fairfax Drive  
Arlington, VA 22203  
USA

Telephone: 703.588.3030

Facsimile: 703.588.3000

Frank O'Gara: 703.588.3260

[Frank.O'Gara@hq.dodea.edu](mailto:Frank.O'Gara@hq.dodea.edu)

Elaine Kanellis: 703.588.3265

[Elaine.Kanellis@hq.dodea.edu](mailto:Elaine.Kanellis@hq.dodea.edu)

Visit the DoDEA website  
for more information.  
<http://www.dodea.edu>

## Inform Students of the Advantages to Taking AP Courses

Advanced Placement courses are a great way to jumpstart a student's college career while earning college level credits. The College Board offers 30 AP courses and exams for students in multiple subject areas. These courses allow students to potentially earn credits for college while also having the opportunity of taking a more advanced course load.

If you aren't doing this already, sending out a letter or including a small article in the school newsletter or bulletin highlighting the advantages of taking AP courses is one way to inform students of the many opportunities available to students that enroll in AP after they graduate from high school. (The last page of this document includes some explanations for taking an AP course that you can include in your newsletter.)

Getting your school guidance counselor involved is another way to spark student interest in AP courses. Guidance counselors can talk with interested students about taking AP course classes and discuss the ways that AP can benefit them in college.

Partner with colleges and universities through the Education Centers to arrange for college representatives to talk to students. Encourage students to take virtual tours of colleges they might be interested in. Seek alumni in your community to speak to students at college night or other times during the year.

Recognize current AP students for their accomplishments to raise academic expectations and standards, improve morale, attract new students to AP and publicize the school and the program to the overall community.

Implementing summer programs that focus on AP is a great way to ease students into AP. A mock AP course will allow students to get an idea for what they can expect in an AP course and will ease their transition to AP.

There are a number of advantages for students that are currently enrolled in an AP course or that are thinking of taking an AP course:

### **Students have more time to take other courses in college.**

*It might be easier for students to pursue a double major or minor or take elective courses that interest them if the college that they attend substitutes high AP test scores (4's and 5's usually) for course credits. Students should check with the college*

Host an AP Night: Many schools have adopted "AP Nights" that allow for administrators and teachers to talk to students and their parents about the benefits of enrolling in AP level courses, the curriculum and what is expected in-class and outside of class. To make it more interesting you can host AP nights in conjunction with another event like a Spaghetti Night or dessert sampling.

## TIPS



or university that they are interested in attending to find out what their requirements are and if they accept AP exam scores as a substitute for some college credits.

### **Allows students to take up a double major or a minor, or take more electives.**

*Taking AP classes might allow students to fulfill some of their general education course requirements. With those classes out of the way a student might have more time to take up a double major, select a minor course or take elective courses that interest them.*

### **Develop college level academic skills.**

*Enrolling in AP courses enables students to develop more rigorous study habits and take on more challenging course work that parallels what they might see in college level courses. AP courses challenge students and allows them to build critical thinking skills while working on their ability to collaborate in groups.*

### **Increases eligibility for some scholarships.**

*Approximately 31 percent of colleges and universities will consider a student's AP course work when making decisions about which students will receive scholarships (See: [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)). Students can check [collegeboard.com](http://collegeboard.com), [fastweb.com](http://fastweb.com), or [scholarships.com](http://scholarships.com) for more information on AP scholarships.*

### **Increases college interest in the student.**

*Taking an AP course can also help students boost their grade point average (GPA) and gives one additional factor for colleges or universities to look at when they apply for scholarships and on your college applications. Approximately 85 percent of selective colleges and universities reported that they looked at whether or not a student had taken an AP course to make their admissions decision (See: [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)).*

*College Admissions Counselors see students that take AP course work as having the ability to take on the challenges necessary to further their education and they equate that to a student having a greater success rate in college. They see these students as being hard-working and self-motivated.*

### **Students may be able to save money.**

*If students take enough AP classes throughout their high school career they could potentially graduate from college a semester or even a year earlier since many of their college credits would have been fulfilled. Early graduation has its pros and cons but for students that know that they won't apply for financial aid during college this could be a definite way to save money on tuition.*

## **Who Should Take An AP Course?**

Usually when parents or students think of AP they believe that the courses are only available to students that would be considered high achievers. The reality is that any student can enroll in an AP course regardless of physical or

mental blocks that the student might feel may be preventing them from taking AP.

Since AP is geared toward preparing students for college, all students interested in attending a college or university should really consider taking an AP course.

However, students must decide on whether or not their schedules can accommodate the rigorous amount of time and dedication needed to take an AP course.

## Helping Students Prepare for and Take the AP Exams

End of the year AP exams can seem daunting to a student, especially since they are preparing for final projects and assignments and gearing up for other exams. Many students may feel some slight anxiety when getting ready to take the AP exam. One way to help students prepare for the exam is to arrange for before and after school tutoring using volunteers or peers to help students that are struggling. Congratulate students that have completed a week of testing with a snack after the final test or another reward.

## Keeping Parents Involved

Keeping parents up-to-date on what is happening within our system and within our schools is one of our biggest priorities. Whatever course of action you decide to take, be sure to keep parents involved at every step of the process. Parents will talk to their children about taking AP courses and help them to make an informed decision about their education.

## Administrators can:

**Host an AP Night:** Many schools have adopted “AP Nights” that allow for administrators and teachers to talk to students and their parents about the benefits of enrolling in AP level courses, the curriculum and what is expected in-class and outside of class. To make it more interesting you can host AP nights in conjunction with another event like a Spaghetti Night or dessert sampling.

**Case Study:** Homewood-Flossmoor, a suburban high school in Illinois that has experienced an impressive 48 percent growth in its AP program since 1999. Each year, the school invites invite parents and students to an event called the AP Showcase. The Showcase begins with a panel discussion featuring recent Homewood-Flossmoor graduates, current AP students, a college admissions officer, and the school’s college consultants. The panel discusses the benefits of AP courses and exams, how AP is viewed in the college admissions process, and earning college credit. Then, students and parents attend three 10-minute “mini-AP classes” of their choice, during which AP teachers present overviews of their courses, including expectations and typical assignments. These presentations give families a chance to meet AP teachers and learn about AP courses prior to registration.

You can learn more about Homewood-Flossmoor High School here: [http://connection-collegeboard.com/home/midwestern/258-exemplary-apr-program-homewood-flossmoor-high-school-flossmoor-ill](http://connection.collegeboard.com/home/midwestern/258-exemplary-apr-program-homewood-flossmoor-high-school-flossmoor-ill)

In some schools teachers have students and their parents sign an agreement that holds them accountable to the AP course and everything that it entails, including preparing for the end-of-course exam. An agreement might also ensure the completion of work that falls outside the school year, such as summer reading and writing assignments to prepare for the course.

## Support Teachers and AP Coordinators

An effective AP program varies by school and depends on each school's unique culture, resources and needs. A school's AP Coordinator is responsible for ordering AP exams, receiving and checking shipments, organizing testing, finding and training proctors, returning exams for scoring, and distributing AP exam results. Coordinators often need support from their school's leadership to handle the challenges of coordinating their schools' AP programs. As a friendly reminder: the AP Coordinator should not be an AP teacher.

### Administrators can help AP Coordinators by:

- » Finding out what support AP coordinators need to help them to meet their goals.
- » Recognizing your school's AP Coordinator for their hard work during the AP exam administration week.

These are just a few helpful tips to get you get started on working toward increasing the AP enrollment in your school.

Talk with your AP teachers and the AP coordinator in your school to get an idea of what they see as some of the strengths and weaknesses of your school's AP program and invite them to a brainstorming session to come up with a specific AP improvement plan that will work for your school.

**NOTE: This text can also be downloaded in Microsoft Word format. Please click here to download the document for easy cut and past capabilities.**

## **Insert for Parent Newsletter: The Benefits of Taking AP Courses**

Advanced Placement courses often come with a common misconception—that they are only available to high achieving students. The reality is that any student can enroll in an AP course regardless of physical or mental blocks that the student might feel may be preventing them from taking AP.

Since AP is geared toward preparing students for college, all students interested in attending a college or university should really consider taking an AP course. However, students must decide on whether or not their schedules can accommodate the rigorous amount of time and dedication needed to take an AP course.

If your child is thinking of enrolling in an AP class, here are some things to consider about the benefits of taking an AP course.

### **Students have more time to take other courses in college.**

It might be easier for students to pursue a double major or minor or take elective courses that interest them if the college that they attend substitutes high AP test scores (4's and 5's usually) for course credits. Students should check with the college or university that they are interested in attending to find out what their requirements are and if they accept AP exam scores as a substitute for some college credits.

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*To learn more about AP programs in your school check with your school counselor or visit DoDEA's website ([www.dodea.edu](http://www.dodea.edu)) or the College Board's (<http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/public/courses/index.html>) website for more information.*