



BEST PRACTICES FOR EQUITABLE ADVANCED COURSE PARTICIPATION AND SUPPORTS

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INTRODUCTION

Advanced coursework programs, such as Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and honors classes, are designed to expose students to advanced academic content and prepare students for postsecondary success. These courses are faster paced and provide deeper instruction than traditional course work.¹ While the benefits of advanced coursework programs are clear, nationally, only about 27 percent of students in advanced course classes are from underrepresented racial and ethnic populations.²

To support member districts in ensuring equitable representation in advanced coursework, Hanover created this report that outlines best practices for encouraging enrollment and participation in advanced courses, in addition to the supports that schools offer to students enrolled in advanced courses. The study specifically focuses on research and practices that promote academic success among students from underrepresented demographic groups. This report includes the following sections:

- **Section I: Promoting Advanced Course Enrollment** describes effective strategies for increasing enrollment in advanced high school courses, specifically among students from underrepresented racial, ethnic, and gender groups.
- **Section II: Supporting Student Success** describes effective student-centered and school-wide supports for student success and continued growth in advanced high school courses.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings, Hanover suggests that districts consider the following recommendations:



Evaluate course entry requirements for high school advanced courses to ensure students have multiple opportunities to enter advanced course pathways. Removing structural barriers to participation in addition to opening up more options for entering advanced course pathways can help promote broader and more equitable participation for students who may not have received support in earlier grades that would have directed them toward advanced courses.



Continue increasing course rigor and offering academic support programs from elementary to high school. Increasing rigor in earlier grades can help provide supports students need to feel prepared for advanced courses once entering high school. Further, integrating programs like AVID or Summer Bridge, and ensuring all students have access to those programs, can provide students with supports and resources needed to continue through advanced course pathways.



Bolster family engagement and communication surrounding advanced course opportunities, beginning in middle school. Sharing opportunities with families can be particularly relevant for students from underrepresented groups, who may not have had the same academic opportunities in earlier years and thus be unaware of those opportunities when entering high school. Hosting parent events, outreach, and sharing accessible information about enrollment (e.g., in multiple languages when relevant), can help share knowledge with families.

KEY FINDINGS

¹ [1] Ricciardi, C. and A. Winsler. "Selection Into Advanced Courses in Middle and High School Among Low-Income, Ethnically Diverse Youth." *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 32:3, August 2021. Obtained from EBSCOhost. [2] "Closing Troubling Racial Gaps in Advanced Courses - FutureEd." <https://www.future-ed.org/closing-troubling-racial-gaps-in-advanced-courses/>

² Ricciardi and Winsler, Op. cit.



There is limited research available regarding gender underrepresentation in advanced courses. Much of the research focuses on the underrepresentation of Latino and Black students. However, some of the research provides an indication that males are often underrepresented in advanced courses, with White females and Asian students being the most frequently represented in advanced courses.



Exposing students to rigorous course material and higher-level thinking in elementary and middle school can help prepare students for high school advanced courses. Students who enter high school without that exposure to rigorous or advanced courses are less likely to have an opportunity to participate in an advanced course. Furthermore, fostering such skills at the middle school level can overcome barriers such as a lack of self-efficacy or confidence in academic skills. Fulton County Schools even increased rigor in elementary grades to promote exposure to rigorous curricula and prepare students to advanced coursework at an early age.



Evaluating equitable access to advanced courses requires districts to collect, analyze, and use data on course participation. Districts can collect data on course participation to understand where biases might exist and use such data to change policy and practice. Districts may also consider publicly reporting that data on a yearly basis to create accountability and transparency surrounding data processes and procedures.



Schools can overcome barriers to advanced course entry through considering structural changes to course rigor and advanced course entry requirements. One of the key barriers research identifies is course entry requirements for advanced courses. This barrier can constrain students' participation because it may begin in early grades. For example, if students do not have access to rigorous coursework early in their academic career, rigorous advanced course entry requirements can limit entry into those courses in high school and exacerbate disparities in enrollment. Several districts have eliminated such entry requirements to promote equity, and others have increased course rigor throughout all educational grades to bolster rigor early on.



Providing student support and encouragement can bolster advanced course enrollment, through parent, peer, and counselor support. Parents may not be aware that they can request advanced courses for their children, even if they were not initially recommended for an advanced course. Schools and districts may use targeted outreach to share this knowledge and encourage parents to enroll their students. Other strategies for bolstering student support include peer and teacher tutoring sessions, which can help students gain extra support on challenging material outside of the class and guidance counselor encouragement and support.



Advanced support programs like AVID and Summer Bridge programs, paired with financial incentives and supports, are two strategies that can support students once enrolled in advanced coursework. These programs help bolster students' academic supports. For example, the AVID curriculum promotes higher-order thinking skills and provides resources that can support students when taking pre-AP and AP courses. Summer Bridge programs can similarly provide academic support for students to ensure continuation through advanced course pathways. Finally, one barrier to participation from underrepresented groups may be the financial cost of AP exams or other testing requirements. Schools that offer waivers or incentives can overcome this financial barrier.

SECTION I: PROMOTING ADVANCED COURSE ENROLLMENT

In this section, Hanover reviews strategies to increase equitable access to advanced coursework. This section begins by describing the equity issues in advanced course access and enrollment criteria and goes on to provide guidance and best practices for identifying enrollment criteria and increasing access to underserved student groups.

EQUITY ISSUES IN ADVANCED COURSE ENROLLMENT CRITERIA

Advanced coursework can provide pathways for more rigorous opportunities in a student's future and prepare students for post-secondary success while also, in many cases, providing college credit before students graduate high school. Advanced coursework includes opportunities like Advanced Placement (AP) courses, dual or concurrent enrollment courses that count for high school and college credit, honors courses, and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses. Some of these courses (e.g., AP, IB) often require students to pass exams to receive college-level credit, but the rigor and high expectations found in these courses also prepare students for post-graduation endeavors.

K-12 education has remained focused for many years on preparing students for college and careers and has used advanced coursework as a strong mechanism for this preparation. Research shows that students are more engaged and work harder when they are given access to advanced coursework. Advanced opportunities often reduce absences and suspensions while increasing graduation rates, leading to postsecondary success for students that graduate with college credit. However, minority students are not given the same level of access to these opportunities.³

However, the inequitable distribution of funding and the limited pathways for student participation and success have led to a homogenous enrollment in these courses for many districts across the country. Indeed, "[n]ational data from the Civil Rights Data Collection show that students who are Black, Indigenous, and other non-Black people of color (BIPOC) are not enrolled in AP courses at rates comparable to their white and Asian peers and experience less success when they are."⁴ The Center for American Progress found this to be true even when students attend schools with similar levels of AP course availability.⁵

Throughout a student's educational career, the pipeline to advanced coursework narrows for many low-income and minority students. Research indicates that many years of bias add up to determine who has access to advanced programs and how difficult that access is to get. Groups with limited access fall behind in college and career readiness, further limiting their future opportunities. For example, **Error! Reference source not found.** on the following page shows a sample academic track in Science courses that often occurs, both for students that are able to take advanced course and those that enroll in non-advanced courses. This figure, drawn from a 2014 article examining English Learner (EL) participation in advanced courses in the *American Educational Research Journal*, demonstrates that students who begin Grade 9 on an advanced course track often stay on that track until graduation, while students on the general science track or EL science track have fewer opportunities to enroll in an advanced science course.⁶

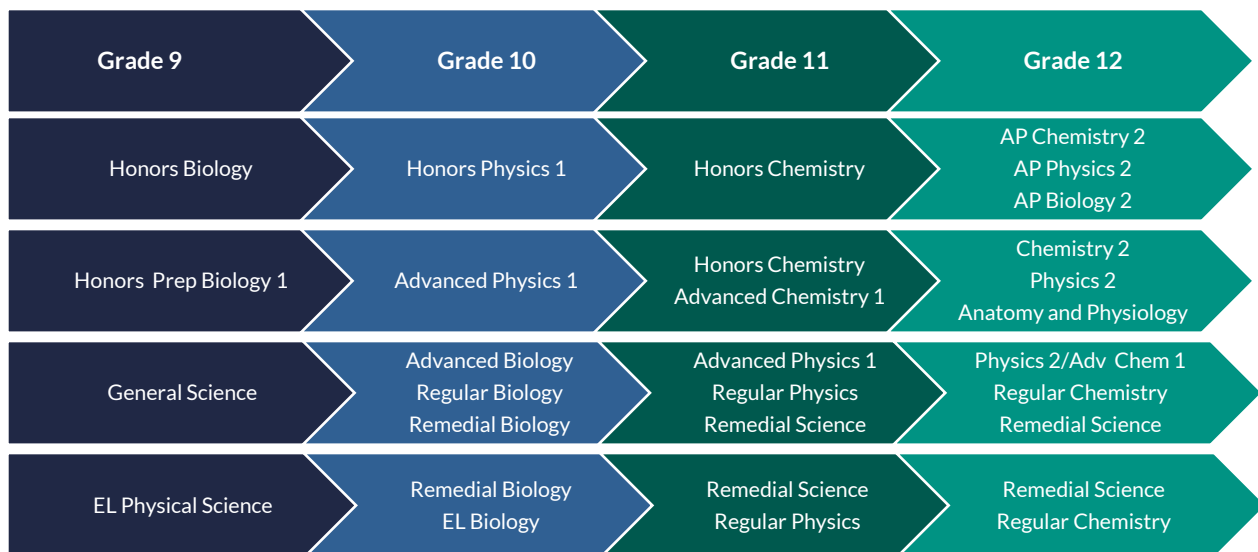
³ "5 Things to Advance Equity in Access to and Success in Advanced Coursework." The Education Trust, December, 9, 2019. <https://edtrust.org/resource/5-things-to-advance-equity-in-access-to-and-success-in-advanced-coursework/>

⁴ Chatterji, R., N. Campbell, and A. Quirk. "Closing Advanced Coursework Equity gaps for All Students." Center for American Progress, June 30, 2021. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2021/06/30/500759/closing-advanced-coursework-equity-gaps-students/>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Figure 1.1: Course Sequence for Science



Source: *American Educational Research Journal*⁷

Although some schools are increasing access for minority students and providing a choice to enroll, minority students may not enroll because they feel unprepared and are scared of failure.⁸ Figure 1.2 describes many of the systemic barriers to advanced coursework participation faced by minority students. These structural barriers that reduce equitable opportunities lead to achievement gaps between student groups.

Figure 1.2: Systemic Barriers for Advanced Course Enrollment

SYSTEMIC OBSTACLES	DESCRIPTION
Resource inequities	The resource inequities caused by funding gaps in school districts that serve large populations of students of color have found profound effects on the educational opportunities districts and schools are able to provide.
Educator bias	Teacher bias is one of the largest barriers for Black and Latinx students, especially when school leadership overly relies on the recommendations of teachers and counselors whose judgments may be shaped by implicit or explicit racial bias.
Assessment and grading biases	These biases are prevalent in testing and grading practices.
Lack of access to diverse educators	The lack of diverse educators is consequential for all students, but particularly for Black students, whom Black teachers play a large role in identifying as prepared for advanced coursework or not.
Inequitable access to quality early childhood opportunities	The lack of early opportunities contributes to differences in the quality of children's early childhood experiences and can affect the way educators identify giftedness or advanced skills in young children.
Lack of communication with families	Lack of communication – including lack of communication in families' home languages – about advanced opportunities makes it unnecessarily difficult for families to find information on the enrollment process.

Source: The Education Trust⁹

⁷ Figure reproduced verbatim from: Ibid.

⁸ Sparks, Sarah. "Schools Seek to Diversify Gifted, Honors Classes." *Education Week*, October 27, 2015. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/schools-look-to-diversify-gifted-honors-classes/2015/10>

⁹ Figure content taken verbatim with modifications from: "Black and Latino Students Shut Out of Advanced Coursework Opportunities." The Education Trust, January 9, 2020. <https://edtrust.org/press-release/black-and-latino-students-shut-out-of-advanced-coursework-opportunities/>

BEST PRACTICES IN ADVANCED COURSEWORK ACCESS AND ENROLLMENT

When districts consciously extend advanced course opportunities to low-income and minority students and ensure teachers have the resources and training necessary, these students perform well among their peers. Therefore, districts must consider ways to increase the communication and involvement surrounding advanced course enrollment to overcome the opportunity gap present for underserved student groups. While changing enrollment criteria or policies may increase access for some, districts must also consider the communication of advanced options to students and parents. Furthermore, districts should identify data and monitor progress for student access and achievement to hold themselves accountable for their equity goals.¹⁰ Figure 1.3 provides high-level strategies for increasing access to advanced course options for minority groups.








Figure 1.3: District Strategies for Advancing Equitable Access

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set clear, measurable goals for advancing access to and success in advanced coursework and commit to publicly measuring district progress (disaggregated by race and income) toward those goals. Use data to identify the barriers that prevent students of color and students from low-income backgrounds from enrolling in advanced courses. Expand advanced coursework opportunities through more courses or seats or both. Work with the state to expand eligibility and increase access to advanced courses for students that do not have a fair chance to take advanced coursework.
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Source: The Education Trust¹¹

Figure 1.4 outlines more specific strategies provided by the Center for American Progress that target improving course access and outcomes for underrepresented groups and may be applied at the district or school level.

Figure 1.4: District Strategies to Increase Course Access

	Invest in ongoing collaboration between elementary, middle, and high school staff to continually improve alignment and coordination of instructional concepts and vocabulary.
	Work to optimize school-wide master schedules or reduce conflicts and open up more slots for students in advanced coursework.
	Remain open to leveraging technology to expand offerings , which could entail virtual offerings across schools within a district, in regional partnerships, and through high-quality state virtual schools.
	Recruit and mentor students early in their high school careers to prepare them for enrollment and success in advanced coursework.
	Analyze data to reduce opportunities for bias in systems used to identify students for advanced courses from elementary through high school.
	Initiate regular conversations with families in their home languages about advanced coursework registration timelines, program availability, and cost reductions.
	Create pathways for students to succeed in advanced coursework (e.g., mentoring, tutoring, group support).

Source: Center for American Progress¹²

¹⁰ "5 Things to Advance Equity in Access to and Success in Advanced Coursework." Op. Cit.

¹¹ Figure information taken verbatim from: "Black and Latino Students Shut Out of Advanced Coursework Opportunities." Op. cit.

¹² Figure information quoted verbatim with modifications from: "Closing Advanced Coursework Equity Gaps for All Students." Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/closing-advanced-coursework-equity-gaps-students/>

Schools can increase access to advanced courses by removing prerequisite course requirements, therefore reducing barriers for students who feel that they do not meet the requirements to be in these courses.¹³ Teachers, counselors, and administrators can also recruit students with whom they have relationships by discussing the benefits and supports that will be available to them once they are a part of the course.¹⁴

Districts may also have success in identifying potential AP students by requiring all Grade 10 students to take the PSAT and using these results for class recommendations. Some districts, such as Houston Independent School District and Hillsborough County Public Schools, are highlighted by the College Board for requiring parents to sign an “opt out” form if students chose not to enroll in an AP course after their PSAT score qualified them for the course.¹⁵

Figure 1.5 identifies guiding principles and best practices for course access equity from the New York Department of Education, many of which align with the recommendations in Figure 1.3 and Figure 1.4. These best practices address access issues at all levels and encourage a wider strategy beyond high school enrollment policies. **Specifically, the guiding principles suggest increasing advanced course preparation in early grades and providing multiple ways for students to access and enroll in advanced courses.**¹⁶

Figure 1.5: Course Access Equity Practices

GUIDING PRINCIPLES	POSITIVE PRACTICES
Provide a course sequence and foundation-building in earlier grades that make later advanced coursework a viable option	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring high expectations for all students Scaffolding curriculum in the early grades so that all students are prepared for advanced coursework in high school Providing educators with necessary professional development across grade spans
Create multiple access points to advanced courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating multiple pathways so students can enroll in Honors, AP, IB, DE, and other advanced courses at various points throughout their school experience Providing access to school counselors who have the skills and training to engage with families and students of all backgrounds, enabling them to better help students navigate course enrollment to prepare for college and careers Providing information on advanced coursework in the student’s home language so that both students and parents are aware of all options available
Use only enrollment access criteria that are educationally necessary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive practices including considering the relevance of course prerequisites and considering non-academic aspects of readiness for advanced coursework An equitable enrollment policy using multiple measures to identify students for advanced coursework Districts should consider practices that may have a negative impact on access for underserved students, including the use of teacher or administrator recommendations or rigid GPA cutoffs as the sole or controlling criteria for course access, unrelated entrance task or exams, and nonessential prerequisites
Offer a robust set of student supports that help all students succeed in advanced courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive practices for support include tutoring, access to technology, and support from school counselors Examine waivers for AP or IB tests and dual enrollment tuition

¹³ Blad, E. “Tearing Down the Gates To Advanced Courses.” *Education Week*, 39:24, March 4, 2020.

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eue&AN=142080223&site=ehost-live>

¹⁴ Flores, S. and M.O. Gomez. “Strategies for Increasing Advanced Placement Participation for Underrepresented Students: Barriers, Practices, and Positive Outcomes.” *NASSP Bulletin*, 95:1, March 1, 2011. Obtained from SAGE journals.

¹⁵ “District Leadership Playbook: Expanding Access to Advanced Placement for Students of Color.” The College Board. P. 16. <https://www.niu.edu/ilhstocollege/resources/speed-up1/CollegeBoard.APDistrictLeadershipPlaybook.March2015.pdf>

¹⁶ “Equitable Course Access Guidance.” New York State Education Department, November 18, 2019. <http://www.nysed.gov/memo/essa/equitable-course-access-guidance>

GUIDING PRINCIPLES	POSITIVE PRACTICES
Publish materials that encourage all students to participate in advanced courses and make these materials available in multiple languages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Course guides ▪ Enrollment information and instructions ▪ Letters to parents that invite students to participate in advanced courses describe how these courses will benefit students as they pursue college and careers, and describe the supports provided to encourage student success

Source: New York State Education Department¹⁷


In the following subsections, Hanover further examines some of the recommended strategies for improving advanced course enrollment, such as increasing access to rigor and enhancing students' self-efficacy, engaging parents in course decisions, and engaging teachers to understand their biases when recommending students for advanced courses.

INCREASED RIGOR

Rigorous course material for all students can lead to increased student enrollment in advanced courses. Students are required to have strong reading, writing, and verbal communication skills, strong academic grades, and test scores to gain admission into advanced courses.¹⁸ When students in underrepresented demographic groups are assigned to low-track placements, they are not exposed to the same rigor as their peers and are not required to use higher order thinking skills. A rigorous curriculum for all students requires the development of high order thinking skills and enables a larger percentage of students to demonstrate the knowledge necessary to enroll in advanced courses.¹⁹

The College Board recommends that schools build a “critical mass” of underrepresented students in AP courses to shift the culture regarding advanced course enrollment and increase rigor for all students. The College Board highlights Houston Independent School District, where the former Superintendent designated one high school as an “AP high school.” **In this new structure, students are required to enroll in advanced coursework, demonstrating that all students are capable of success.** Specifically, students in Grade 9 take two Pre-AP courses, students in Grade 10 complete Pre-AP classes and one AP course, and students complete at least two AP courses during Grades 11 and 12.²⁰

Research and education advocates highlight the importance of exposing all students to a rigorous curriculum at the elementary and middle school levels to prepare students for advanced coursework and postsecondary preparation.



Spotlight: Increasing Rigor in the Elementary Grades—Fulton County Schools

Fulton County School System in Georgia was recognized by the Broad Foundation for improving access to AP courses for African American students. One essential strategy was the **expansion of gifted services for elementary students** to ensure more children are exposed to a rigorous curriculum at an early age.

Specifically, the district expanded its gifted services from programs at two elementary schools to the employment of a gifted education teacher at each of its 58 elementary campuses. Due to this change, the district saw an increase in the number of elementary students identified as gifted from 300 to over 1,000. Further, nearly 2,000 students receive some type of gifted services.²¹

¹⁷ Figure content taken verbatim with modifications from: Ibid.

¹⁸ Kanno and Kangas, Op. cit.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ “District Leadership Playbook: Expanding Access to Advanced Placement for Students of Color.” Op. cit., p. 17.

²¹ “The Road to Equity: Expanding AP Access and Success for African American Students.” The Broad Foundation. 2013. P. 5.
<https://www.issuelab.org/resources/15409/15409.pdf>

SELF-EFFICACY

Further, requiring rigorous course material with appropriate scaffolds and differentiation can help to build students' self-confidence and lead to higher enrollment and self-advocacy for enrollment in advanced courses. Students in underrepresented demographic groups often feel that advanced course opportunities are beyond their reach and may have received this message through certain bias in past teachers. Creating personalized learning environments within the classroom, where students work with the teacher in flexible groups, can create a feeling of accomplishment and help to build a student's self-efficacy.²² Figure 1.6 highlights ways that schools can build a student's self-efficacy.

Figure 1.6: Ways to Build Self-Efficacy



Source: *Ed News Daily*²³

Districts may support students in developing self-efficacy by offering programs or supports that target specific skills or areas of content knowledge, such as study habits or writing skills. For example, an Oklahoma high school profiled by the College Board gathered data from feeder middle schools to identify areas in which students would need additional support to succeed in rigorous courses. Specifically, high school administrators identified “overarching commonalities in [incoming] students, such as their lack of a common academic vocabulary, consistent independent study habits, or note-taking strategies.” In response, school leaders created a “freshman notebook” with success strategies, which was distributed to all students at the beginning of Grade 9.²⁴

Notifying students of their rights in the course selection process will allow students to self-advocate for themselves when advanced courses become available. Another challenge that students face is a lack of information, regarding which courses they should take and when. Providing the entire student body with presentations about advanced course offerings and how participation in those courses will affect their future can increase enrollment in advanced courses. Once students can understand the value of advanced courses, they will be more inclined to enroll.²⁵

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

As noted above, families must be informed of which course options exist and how those opportunities can benefit students, as this allows parents to take an active role in the decision-making process. Often, parents from underrepresented demographic groups are unaware that there are advanced course options for their children in high school, and therefore do not know that they can advocate for their children to be placed in

²² “Close the Achievement Gap: 5 Specific Strategies | EdNews Daily.” <https://www.ednewsdaily.com/close-the-achievement-gap-5-specific-strategies/>

²³ Figure information quoted verbatim with modifications from: Ibid.

²⁴ “Increasing Access to AP for Traditionally Underserved Students.” The College Board. 2010. P. 10. <https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/pdf/spotlight-success-student-supports.pdf>

²⁵ Harackiewicz, J.M. et al. “Helping Parents to Motivate Adolescents in Mathematics and Science: An Experimental Test of a Utility-Value Intervention.” *Psychological Science*, 23:8, August 1, 2012. Obtained from SAGE journals.

these courses.²⁶ Frequent contact between the school and families, especially during course selection, can help parents to become a more active member in the decision-making process.²⁷ Further, parents who do not have college backgrounds or positive educational experiences may not see the value in pursuing advanced courses or postsecondary education. In response, schools must help parents understand the positive effects of advanced coursework in order to encourage their increased support and partnership.²⁸

One common strategy for engaging families is to host informational events. Figure 1.7 shows examples of information sessions that a middle or high school could hold for their parents related to advanced coursework and postsecondary opportunities.

Figure 1.7: Parent Information Options



Source: *American Educational Research Journal* ²⁹

Holding events and sharing information in multiple languages is also important for encouraging parent participation. Schools may mail informational brochures for parents to students' homes, with topics such as helping students find value in their education, helping students prepare for what is ahead, and course options and what they mean for a student's future.³⁰



Spotlight: Informing Parents

In a study conducted in a sample of high school students in Wisconsin, researchers found success in increasing course participation by informing parents about the importance of advanced courses on a child's future success. The 2012 study, which was originally published in *Psychological Science*, focused on families from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds who participated in the Wisconsin Study of Families and Work. It should be noted that most of the participants were White or Biracial.

Two brochures and a link to an informational website were used to provide information to families discussing the benefits of STEM education. Of the parents and children involved in the study, 86 percent of parents and 75 percent of students found the brochures to be useful. The researchers also found that students in the experimental group who received the course information took an average of nearly one additional math or science course in their final two years of high school, compared to students in the control group who did not receive the brochures or website.³¹

CONSIDERATIONS FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

To increase access to advanced coursework for English learners, district staff must shift mindsets away from the notion that language proficiency is needed to process rigorous instruction. Educators may hold biased beliefs that EL students would struggle in higher-order thinking, problem-solving, and deep academic

²⁶ Kanno and Kangas, Op. cit.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Harackiewicz, J.M. et al. "Helping Parents to Motivate Adolescents in Mathematics and Science: An Experimental Test of a Utility-Value Intervention." *Psychological Science*, 23:8, August 1, 2012. Obtained from SAGE journals.

²⁹ Figure information quoted verbatim with modifications from: Kanno and Kangas, Op. cit.

³⁰ Harackiewicz et al., Op. cit.

³¹ Ibid.

conversations because they still need to develop their language skills. However, this is not the case, and placing students in advanced courses can improve their English language proficiency. Districts must ensure that evaluation procedures to enroll in advanced courses do not screen out ELs because of their limited language proficiency. Instead, districts should look for ways to increase EL participation in advanced courses and examine the existing data on EL enrollment. For example, schools could offer advanced language courses (e.g., AP Spanish) to native speakers in earlier grades to learn higher-level skills and build up the confidence to take additional advanced courses in the future.³²

CASE STUDY – NJNS AFFILIATED SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Several districts in the New Jersey Network of Superintendents (NJNS), who work together to design systemwide approaches to educational equity, examined the access and success in their advanced course programs. One large suburban district, West Windsor-Plainsboro School District, found that Black and Latinx families were not advocating for enrollment in AP courses, and educators were not recommending those students even if they met prerequisites. The district revised its AP enrollment criteria to encourage participation of students whose teachers were less likely to recommend them. Several districts in the NJNS made changes to policies that outlined enrollment criteria. Districts determined that teacher recommendations in particular excluded students who could succeed in advanced coursework.

Districts took various approaches to reduce the bias in teacher recommendations, including using multiple metrics as criteria, family engagement, waiving all requirements, and leaning on guidance counselors to encourage students. In addition to these policy changes, districts also approached increasing access through structural changes. One district designed a summer program for AP preparation for students who never took an AP course before, which led teachers to have higher expectations for students who were often viewed as low achieving. Many districts also used additional educational strategies and increased the professional development for teaching and advising roles to improve equitable access and support.³³

As outlined in Figure 1.8, district strategies to increase access to advanced courses include:³⁴

- Structural changes in offerings;
- Policy changes in requirements and reporting; and
- Educational or professional development strategies to increase the quality of teaching and/or advising.

³² Melendez-Quintero, C.J. "English Learners and Advanced Placement Courses." *Expediting Reading Comprehension for English Language Learners*, December 21, 2020. <http://exc-ell.com/english-learners-and-advanced-placement-courses/>

³³ Roegman, R. and T. Hatch. "The AP lever for boosting access, success, and equity." Kappan, February 2016. pp. 21-22. <https://www.tc.columbia.edu/ncrest/publications--resources/0031721716629653.pdf>

³⁴ Information taken verbatim from: Ibid., pp. 22.

Figure 1.8: Advanced Coursework Access Strategies

STRUCTURAL CHANGES	POLICY CHANGES	EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Open more sections and offer more courses ▪ Develop an AP preparation program for first time AP students ▪ Make an AP course the standard course (or eliminate honors level) ▪ Build more science labs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Require students to take the AP exam to have AP listed on transcripts ▪ Loosen or eliminate enrollment criteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Send teachers and administrators to College Board workshops ▪ Tell parents it is better for students to take AP courses, even if they get a lower grade ▪ Train guidance counselors on identifying and encouraging students to take AP courses

Source: Kappan³⁵

Although different approaches were used, all districts found the process relatively straightforward and successful. Districts had short implementation periods with limited resistance and measurable results to monitor. In response, more students participated in AP courses, which did not decrease average AP scores. The districts continue to evaluate the role educators have in determining advanced course participation. Teachers and counselors often suggested their hesitancy for encouraging many minority students to participate was based on the fear that they would be leading students to failure. This approach is counterproductive to the goal of increasing rigorous academic experiences for underserved students. Districts worked to eliminate subjective elements of enrollment criteria that negatively affect certain student groups. Support, through high expectations, is also essential to increasing equity in advanced coursework.³⁶

³⁵ Figure reproduced verbatim from: Ibid., pp. 23.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 24-25

SECTION II: SUPPORTING STUDENT SUCCESS

Once students are enrolled in advanced courses, it is important to keep them engaged and on track for course and grade-level completion. Students from underrepresented demographic groups often require additional support, which can include academic guidance and preparation, teacher and counselor support, and family support.³⁷

OVERVIEW

Students participating in an advanced course for the first time may feel inadequate and worried about failure due to lack of preparation. These students may struggle with skills like time management, note-taking, and studying for more rigorous courses. Additionally, they often lack encouragement from teachers, which reduces a sense of belonging. This lack of support usually decreases the likelihood that underserved students will enroll in advanced classes to begin with even if they are given the option.³⁸

Once these students are in advanced courses, they must face the rigorous curriculum and often take exams (e.g., AP exam) at the end of the course in order to receive postsecondary credit. Students must pay to take the advanced course exams, which can place a financial burden on students or deter them from obtaining college credit.³⁹

In the following sections, Hanover examines the academic resources and financial incentives that support students in advanced courses, as well as the relationships with and training for teachers, counselors, and parents that enable students to succeed.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

Districts utilize a variety of strategies to support students' academic success, including mandatory tutorials, writing development, AVID or other preparation programs, and summer bridge programs.

Some schools offer academic support by requiring students to attend after-school or weekend tutorial sessions. One high school profiled by the College Board requires students in AP courses to attend three after-school tutorials per week. In order to accommodate this requirement, the school ensures that all after-school activities and sports begin after the tutorial period is finished.⁴⁰ This high school also offers writing support to AP students through a web-based tool. This program “supports original writing in a digital age” and helps students with “paraphrasing, summarizing, citing, and quoting.”⁴¹

During the school year, districts may also offer AVID or other programs that focus on preparing students with effective skills for studying, taking notes, and organizing course assignments. These programs and courses prepare all students, particularly those students who have not completed an advanced course or in the past, to succeed in the challenging environment. Such courses may be optional or required, and similar to other approaches to encouraging rigor, should begin in elementary or middle school to better enable students to succeed.

³⁷ “Close the Achievement Gap: 5 Specific Strategies | EdNews Daily,” Op. cit.

³⁸ Tarasawa, B. and T. Ketelsen. “How to promote equity in advanced coursework participation.” District Administration, March 6, 2020. <https://districtadministration.com/promoting-equity-in-advanced-coursework-participation/>

³⁹ Medlin, P. “Increasing Diversity In AP Programs Seen As Key To Getting More Kids Ready For College.” Northern Public Radio, November 25, 2019. <https://www.northernpublicradio.org/education/2019-11-25/increasing-diversity-in-ap-programs-seen-as-key-to-getting-more-kids-ready-for-college>

⁴⁰ “Increasing Access to AP for Traditionally Underserved Students.” Op. cit., p. 1.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 2.



Spotlight: Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)

The Broad Foundation highlights the use of AVID in Garland Independent School District (ISD). At the elementary level, the program begins with topics such as binder organization and note-taking strategies for students in Grades 4 and 5. In high school, administrators ensure that all participating students are able to have a **daily period for AVID built into their schedules**. High school students complete the AVID curriculum focused on “developing higher order thinking” skills. Further, students are tutored by college students twice per week in small groups, and have guest speakers or attend college visits on Fridays.

Advanced course teachers report that AVID students regularly utilize the resources provided to them through the program when completing work in pre-AP and AP courses. Specifically, students reference various templates and tutorial forms, and teachers praise the level of support that students receive through AVID to help them succeed in advanced courses.

Further, teachers explain that AVID strategies allow them to make the pre-AP or AP curriculum more accessible for all students. For example, one teachers “emphasizes different methods for solving math problems,” while another “has students use the Cornell note-taking method to create study guides and Socratic seminars to prepare for writing a rhetorical essay on the AP exam.”⁴²

Outside of the typical school week, districts may offer or require students to participate in Summer Bridge programs before their advanced course begins in the fall semester. These courses often provide students with study skills, organizational strategies, and basic academic preparation to ensure students are confident and prepared to succeed in the course.⁴³

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Schools may also promote advanced course participation and success by offering financial waivers and incentives. Waivers are often provided for AP exam fees to allow low-income students to complete the test and potentially earn college credit. School leaders must clearly outline the options for test waivers for low-income students who may otherwise struggle to pay test fees. Details as simple as test waivers and encouragement can be deciding factors in whether students participate and succeed in advanced courses.⁴⁴

Districts also often offer incentives to encourage advanced course participation and success. Students are often required to complete a summer bridge program or weekend tutorials, or must earn a “3” on their AP exam to qualify. If students meet the requirement, they are often given a small award (\$25-\$100 or restaurant vouchers) or are entered in a larger raffle for an iPhone, laptop, cash prize, or car. Non-monetary prizes may include special field trips, celebratory meals at the school, or special graduation robes.

TEACHER SUPPORT

Research indicates that teachers have a great impact on students’ growth mindset, and teacher support for underrepresented students in advanced courses is essential to their success. A 2002 research study from the College Board examined 200 high schools with underrepresented minority students and found the following essential elements of AP teachers for supporting minority students:⁴⁵

- Good teachers of minority students are good teachers.
- Teachers should apply high standards fairly to all students.
- Teachers need strong content knowledge and teaching skills.

⁴² “The Road to Equity: Expanding AP Access and Success for African-American Students.” Op. cit., p. 9.

⁴³ “District Leadership Playbook: Expanding Access to Advanced Placement for Students of Color.” Op. cit., p. 17.

⁴⁴ “Equitable Course Access Guidance.” Op. cit.

⁴⁵ Burton, Nancy W., et. al. “Minority Student Success: The Role of Teachers in Advanced Placement Program Courses.” The College Board. 2002. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED561020.pdf>

- Teachers need to make sure that the most fundamental content and skills in the AP curriculum are well covered.
- Teachers can and do use a wide variety of teaching techniques.
- Teachers need to supply both information and a level of comfort about college work and college itself.

Research indicates that teacher bias can be responsible for directing students from underrepresented demographic groups away from advanced courses because teachers may be concerned about the lack of differentiation in instruction and the lack of support in the classroom.⁴⁶ **Training teachers to recognize these biases can shift their actions and allow them to serve students with an equitable mindset.** Identifying teachers that are highly motivated to work with underrepresented demographic groups can also lead to stronger teacher-student relationships and higher levels of student success.⁴⁷

Beyond identifying bias, professional development is vital to ensure that advanced coursework instruction is provided by teachers who are qualified to teach the material and who are skilled in differentiation and scaffolded instruction.⁴⁸ One often cited strategy for encouraging teacher success is the use of collaborative planning time to allow teachers to work together to analyze data, discuss instructional strategies, and plan differentiated lessons.



Spotlight: Collaborative Planning Time

Cypress Bay High School (CBHS) in Florida was recognized by the College Board for demonstrating high pass rates for Latino students on advanced course exams. One highlighted strategy for supporting all students at the school is the use of common assessments at the end of each testing unit. These assessments consist of two or three questions, and are designed to support teachers during common planning time with subject curriculum teams. These teams discuss how well students are mastering content and what additional supports students need to be successful in rigorous courses.

Examples of the questions that teachers may use during these planning meetings include:

- What is the hardest topic that is coming up this quarter? What are the best practices to facilitate the teaching of this topic?
- What new motivational techniques can your group think of in order to motivate the students?
- Was there an assessment that did not go well? Any ideas why?⁴⁹

COUNSELOR SUPPORT

Counselors can play a pivotal role in identifying students that require additional support and developing plans to support them in advanced courses.⁵⁰ Counselors may have similar concerns as teachers related to student success in advanced courses.⁵¹ However, focusing on understanding student need and working to support them through their advanced courses can alleviate those concerns. Counselors can collaborate with teachers, school psychologists, administrators, parents, and students to determine interventions that will be most effective for student success in advanced courses.⁵² Student information sessions can also serve to

⁴⁶ "Increasing Access to AP for Traditionally Underserved Students." Op. cit.

⁴⁷ Flores and Gomez, Op. cit.

⁴⁸ Contributor, U.E. "How to Support First-Time Advanced Placement Students." *Education Week*, June 15, 2017.

<https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/opinion-how-to-support-first-time-advanced-placement-students/2017/06>

⁴⁹ "Increase Access to AP for Traditionally Underserved Students." Op. cit., p. 4.

⁵⁰ Ohrt, J.H., G.W. Lambie, and K.P. Ieva. "Supporting Latino and African-American Students in Advanced Placement Courses: A School Counseling Program's Approach." *Professional School Counseling*, 13:1, October 1, 2009. Obtained from SAGE journals.

⁵¹ Kanno and Kangas, Op. cit.

⁵² Ohrt, Lambie, and Ieva, Op. cit.

inform students of course options, as well as provide them with information about available support options once they are enrolled in advanced courses.

Meeting with individual students to discuss their course options and the implication of each course pathway can ensure that students are well informed throughout the process. Organizing assemblies or events where school leaders who resemble these underrepresented demographic groups can be inspirational, as they share stories about their struggles, how they overcame challenges, and the importance of advanced courses in their journey. Counseling groups can provide strategies and support to students with varying needs and can allow students the opportunity to speak with peers and discuss ways that they overcame their struggles.⁵³

PEER MENTORING SUPPORTS

The support that students receive from their peers and social networks can influence their success, or lack thereof, in advanced courses and school in general. Peer mentoring can play an important role in student success in advanced courses and can build career and academic self-advocacy for students in underrepresented demographic groups.⁵⁴ This type of support may vary, but can include someone to share experiences with, to learn strategies related to dealing with stressful situations, and to create a safe place to debrief situations.⁵⁵ Offering students additional peer study groups or assistance with homework can help students remain on-track in their courses. Further, discussions with a mentor around time management, note taking, and study skills can be important lessons for students who are new to advanced courses.⁵⁶

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ohrt, Lambie, and Ieva, Op. cit.

⁵⁵ Witenko, Mireles-Rios, and Rios, Op. cit.

⁵⁶ Contributor, Op. cit.

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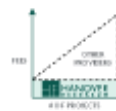
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