

AP Government for all research

Article #1

High school rigor and good advice: Setting up students to succeed (At a glance)

The Center for Public Education

This summary is based on a study by Kasey Klepfer, an Archer Graduate Fellow at the University of Texas at Austin, with the guidance of Jim Hull, senior policy analyst for the Center for Public Education, an initiative of the National School Boards Association.

The demand for workers with a college education is growing faster than the supply of graduates. By 2018, we will have produced 3 million fewer college graduates than the labor market demands (Carnevale, 2010). President Obama has further set a national goal to produce 8 million more graduates by 2020 in order to make the United States the world leader in college attainment.

One way to get there is to prevent the students who enter college from leaving before they earn a credential. Results vary between institutions, but in 2009 only 57.8 percent of students attending four-year colleges graduated in less than six years, and just 32.9 percent of those in two-year institutions graduated in three years (Knapp, 2012). But suppose 90 percent of our current freshmen persisted to a credential. That alone would produce an additional 3.8 million graduates by 2020 -- enough to meet the labor market's needs in this decade and nearly halfway toward meeting the President's goal.

Improving first to second year "persistence" rates in college is a good place to start because students are more likely to drop out their first year than any other (NCHEMS). Of all entering freshmen in 2004, 79 percent returned for the second year of college (ELS 2002-2006). Students in two-year institutions fared worse, at only 64 percent (ELS 2002-2006).

We analyzed longitudinal data tracking high school sophomores in 2002 through their second year in two- and four-year colleges in 2006 (ELS 2002-2006). We were able to identify three factors that were related to increasing a postsecondary students' chances of staying on track to a credential as much as 53 percent, and the process begins in high school. Moreover, the impact of these factors is greatest for students who enter college as the least likely to succeed: students who began high school with below average achievement and below average socioeconomic status.

What it takes to stay on track

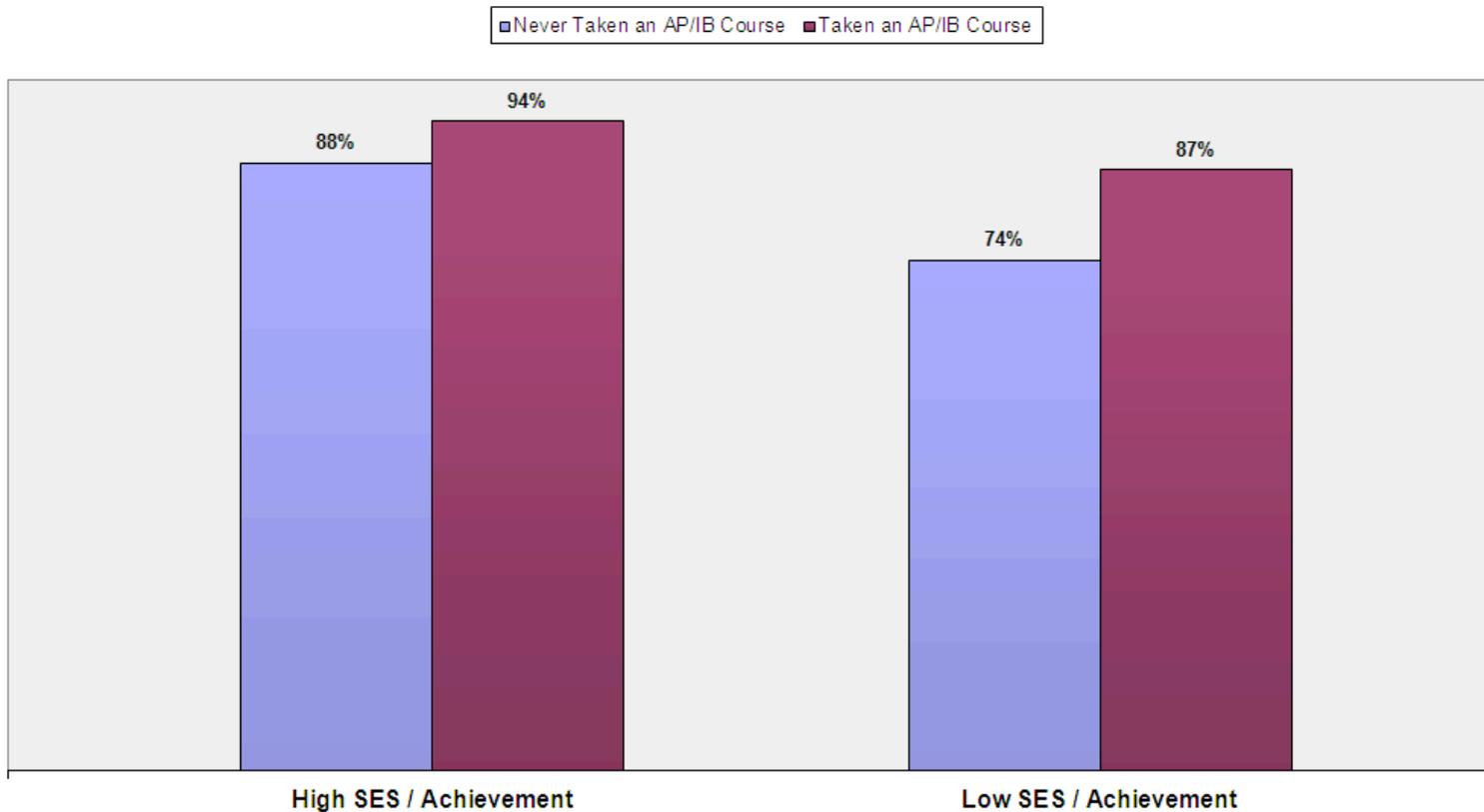
High-level mathematics: Our findings comport with previous studies that show the highest level of math in high school can be one of the largest predictors of college success (Adelman 2006, Conley 2007). Our analysis found that a student with above average SES and achievement had a 10 percent better chance of persisting in a four-year institution if that student had taken Pre-calculus or Calculus or math above Algebra II. Low SES/achievement students with high-level math were 22 percent more likely to persist.

The impact is greatest for students in two-year institutions: The persistence rates of students who took mathematics beyond Algebra II in high school increased by 18 percent for the higher SES/achievement group and 27 percent for the lower SES/achievement students.

Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate courses: Taking an AP/IB course had a dramatic effect on students' chance of persisting even when students fail the end-of-course test. Low achieving and low SES students who took an AP/IB course were 17 percent more likely to persist in four-year colleges and 30 percent more likely to persist in two-year institutions. The more of these courses a student took, the higher their persistence rates were.

Taking AP or IB courses in high school can help mitigate the effects of below average achievement and economic disadvantage on students' post-secondary success. Just by taking these high-level courses, low-income, low-achieving students improved their college persistence rates close to their high-income, high-achieving peers.

**Chart 1: College Freshmen Returning for their Sophomore Year  
In Percent**



Based on students enrolled in four-year colleges. Center for Public Education, 2012

## Article #2

Statistics show AP courses boost success

About half of all Ky. college students fail their freshman year, studies show

Posted: Tuesday, June 29, 2010 12:00 am | Updated: 12:15 am, Sat Mar 17, 2012.

By LIZ SWITZER, The Daily News, [lswitzer@bgdailynews.com](mailto:lswitzer@bgdailynews.com)/

With advanced placement courses becoming increasingly important in college admissions and preparedness for Kentucky students, more high schools are expanding course offerings and more teachers are getting the training they need.

This week at Western Kentucky University, 465 secondary high school teachers are taking part in The Center of Gifted Studies' AP Summer Institute to boost the college success rates of their students, as statistics now show that college students who have not taken an AP course have only a 33 percent chance of completing a bachelor's degree.

College students who have completed one AP course have a 59 percent chance of completing a four-year degree, while students with two or more AP courses under their belt have a 76 percent chance of completing a bachelor's degree, according to the center. Not only do AP courses serve as predictors of college success, they have become essential to college admissions.

"About half of all Kentucky college students fail their freshman year," said Vicki Schmitt, who has taught AP English and literature at Greenwood High School for the past 12 years. "That's an alarming statistic, but by taking an AP class, you are almost guaranteeing your success in college. If you take two, it is astronomical how the success statistic increases."

Greenwood High School now offers 14 AP classes, as will South Warren, said Schmitt, a program participant and who will begin teaching at the new South Warren High School this fall.

"AP helps teachers teach kids how to think," she added. "Students tell me there was not a class in high school that prepared them for college except for their AP classes." Any student can benefit from taking AP classes, as many university admissions offices stress the number of AP classes on an applicant's transcript more than the actual grade that is earned, Schmitt explained. "Even if you make a C in an AP class, there is value in having been in the class," Schmitt said.

The WKU AP Institute is endorsed by the College Board and is only one of three offered in Kentucky. This week's session has drawn teachers from 17 states, Mexico and Morocco, said Julia Roberts, director of The Center of Gifted Studies at WKU, which has offered the teacher training for 27 years. Morehead State University has had a program for seven years and the University of Louisville just added one.

"Advanced placement teachers benefit greatly from spending a week with other successful AP teachers," Roberts said. State law mandates that public high schools have at least four college level classes, but more schools are expanding their offerings, Roberts noted.

Bowling Green High School and the Carol Martin Gatton Academy of Mathematics and Science in Kentucky were recently recognized by Newsweek's 2010 America's Best High Schools list, based on their offerings of advanced placement college-level courses and tests. This year, just more than 1,600 schools, 6 percent of all

the public schools in the U.S., made the list. Bowling Green High ranked 594 nationally and eighth in Kentucky, while the Gatton Academy made the list of the nation's most elite public high schools.

Kentucky has in recent years been the beneficiary of grants that have allowed public schools to greatly expand their advanced courses, Roberts said. In 1995, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices awarded matching grants of \$500,000 to six states to improve disadvantaged students' access to, and success in, college-level Advanced Placement Programs, including Kentucky.

In 2007, the National Math and Science Initiative awarded Kentucky an intensely competitive grant to fund training and incentives for advanced placement courses. The grant, one of seven awarded by NMSI, provides \$13.2 million over six years to a nonprofit organization, Advanced Placement Enterprise of Kentucky, for the extensive training of teachers.

The grants and training programs have helped a lot, but Kentucky still has a way to go toward improving academic standards, said Randy Nantz, who teaches AP English at South Laurel High School in London and attended the WKU program. Many kids in the public school system have not had the chance to take rigorous classes, especially classes that require critical thinking skills, he said.

"The position in education so much has been to make these courses accessible that sometimes the rigor is lost," he said, adding that the recent development of national standards for AP classes has helped to address that.

"In Kentucky schools, I think to some extent it came down to not expecting a lot of our kids to be able to think on that level," Nantz said. "We have always lagged behind in education in the U.S. in what we are giving our kids and what the world demands. These classes are not just a nice bonus to have, they are essential."

### **Article #3**

Is AP for All A Formula For Failure? Jay Mathews

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By Washington Post Editors | June 8, 2009; 11:20 AM ET

I spend much time with aggressive Advanced Placement teachers. They tell me, quite often, that students must be stretched beyond their assumed capabilities. Whenever I try to pass on this advice, however, I become a target for ridicule and disbelief from readers.

Here comes more of that stuff. Newsweek unveils this week my annual rankings of America's Top High Schools, with a new twist that skeptics will find even less congenial.

The latest list, to appear on [newsweek.com](http://newsweek.com), will include about 1,500 schools that have reached a high standard of participation on college-level AP, International Baccalaureate or Cambridge tests. The bad news is they represent less than 6 percent of U.S. public high schools. The good news is that 73 percent of Washington area schools are on the list. The interesting news is that some of those schools have begun to require AP courses and tests for all students, even those who struggle in class.

Newsweek and The Washington Post use the Challenge Index, which I conceived in 1998 and have been fiddling with since. This time I am adding a separate Catching Up list for high schools that use AP as shock treatment for impoverished students who have been in the academic doldrums. On this new list are 29 schools with AP test participation rates high enough to qualify for the Newsweek list but with test passing rates under 10 percent. Seven are in this area: Coolidge, Bell Multicultural, Friendship Collegiate, SEED, Thurgood Marshall and McKinley Tech in the District, and Crossland in Prince George's County.

Some people might call this the straggler list. I don't. I have spoken to the administrators of many of those schools. What they say makes sense. They have tried raising achievement slowly with remedial education. It didn't work, in part because the teachers and students had no worthy goal to shoot for. So they have made the AP test their benchmark, and in preparing for it hope to give low-performing students the strenuous academic exercise they need for college. Few pass the three-hour AP exams, so few get college credit. So what? They aren't in college yet. This way they have a chance to accustom themselves to the foot-high reading assignments and torturous exams they will encounter in college.

Each year, more data suggest that this is the right approach. A new study of 302,969 students who graduated from Texas high schools shows that even low-performing students -- those who got a failing grade of 2 on the 5-point AP test -- did significantly better in college than did similarly low-performing, low-income students who did not take AP. Nationally, most high schools are so lax in their duties that half their students heading for college never take an AP, IB or Cambridge course and test and thus have little clue what awaits them.

Many AP teachers I know spend much of their time coaxing such under-served students into their classes. That is true at Bell Multicultural High School, the first public school in this area to require all students to take AP. And not just any AP. They must study AP English Literature and AP English Language, especially difficult for the many children of immigrants at Bell.

Daniel Gordon, a Harvard University Law School graduate I watched teach at Bell last year, said the prospect of a college-level exam is a big motivator for students. One of them, Esmeralda Posadas, said, "It forced students who don't speak English at home to focus all their attention on it. It is not run-of-the-mill." Only three students got a passing score of 3 or higher on the exam in 2007, but Posadas was one of 31 who got a score of 2.

AP teachers with that kind of attitude are not the majority. A recent Fordham Institute survey revealed that only 38 percent of AP teachers believe "the more students taking AP courses, the better," while 52 percent said "only students who can handle the material" should take AP. One of my favorite bloggers, Fairfax County instructional technology specialist Tim Stahmer of [assortedstuff.com](http://assortedstuff.com), frequently says too many unprepared students are being channeled into AP and urged to go to college.

My response is, what harm does that do? They work harder in high school, and if they graduate still determined not to go to college, they will discover that those AP skills are just what they need to get the best available jobs or trade school slots.

If they don't take an AP class and test, they will never know whether they could have handled it. Many students from non-college families discover they can. Montgomery

County Superintendent Jerry D. Weast has been beefing up instruction in lower grades and luring students into college-level courses for years, with impressive results. The portion of impoverished Montgomery AP students who passed the tests increased from 12.3 percent in 2002 to 22.4 percent in 2006.

The Catching Up schools aren't losers. They are strivers, fueled by the high spirits of teachers who keep telling me how much more their kids can do than they expected. Their schools are exciting. History students are writing an essay every day. English students are publishing books. Those who think this is a good idea are still a beleaguered minority, but we are growing. Watch out.

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