

4/21/15 Academic Choice Spring Parent Feedback Night

April 21, 2015, 7:00-8:30 PM BHS College Career Center

Meeting Notes

The Academic Choice team held a Spring Parent Feedback Night on April 21, 2015. David Borrelli, Matt Laurel and Tim Zolezzi represented the AC teachers. Also in attendance were the AC vice principal, Daniel Nube, and five AC Advisory Council parents (Sam Arriola, Rakhi Rao, Johanna Reneke, Donna Storey, Jeremy Thorner) as well as 8 AC parents.

Introduction

AC Vice Principal Daniel Nube (danielnube@berkeley.net) opened the meeting by reminding us that we had a Fall Informational Meeting in October 2014 during which the teachers and administrators shared information with parents. At this time of year, AC hoped to get feedback from parents on their students' experiences and in particular thoughts on the AP program. He said AC is an exciting and vibrant learning community with challenges but great potential. He thanked the parents present for taking the time to give feedback.

Structure of the Meeting

History Team Lead Teacher Tim Zolezzi (timothyzolezzi@berkeley.net) said this meeting was designed so that every parent gets a chance to speak. Parents would form groups of four or five, discuss the issues and appoint a scribe to type the feedback into a Google Doc so AC could have a record.

The first question was an ice-breaker that would not be recorded: 1) Who is the child or children you represent and 2) What's a memory or experience from high school that is important to you.

Future of AP Courses in AC

AC Student Support Coordinator and English teacher David Borrelli (davidborrelli@berkeley.net) explained the second question. Advanced Placement courses have been an important part of the identity of AC, and the leadership is considering which path to pursue in the future.

In past years, AP courses were segregated, so in an effort to create equity, two years ago all seniors were required to take AP Government. Last year all juniors were required to choose one AP class from English, history or science as well.

The AC leadership is considering three options for the future, which will affect the current freshman class who will be juniors in the 2016-2017 school year:

Option #1 is that all juniors take AP Language and Composition. One benefit is that support resources, including tutors and graders, can be focused on one course. Also AP Language and Composition is most transferrable to college because students learn to write clear argumentative essays.

Option #2 is that all juniors choose one AP class of interest to them. One benefit is that students can choose a class of particular personal interest. A drawback is that it is difficult to provide support for the full range of classes.

Option #3 is to do away with AP junior English and have “AC English,” a rigorous, college-preparatory class. Students can elect to take the AP test at the end of the year, but this will not be designated as an AP class.

English Team Lead Teacher Matt Laurel (mattlaurel@berkeley.net) asked parents to consider which choice would be in the best interest of their student and which choice would be in the best interest of *all* students as a classroom community.

As parents began their discussion, several questions were asked of the teachers.

Q: In the past, did sophomores need a recommendation from their English teacher to take AP Language and Composition?

A: No, the choice was up to the student. The students who signed up for AP were not always the strongest students. Some avoided it because they were concerned about the difficulty and amount of homework. At the beginning of this year, AP Language and Composition students were all given an AP-style diagnostic test. The test was repeated later in the year and all students improved.

Q: If a student isn't successful in a required AP class, what are the repercussions?

A: Without resources, some students feel they are in over their heads. English teachers have moved towards grading by the students' progress and not by a fixed level of achievement. Focus and conscientiousness matters to teachers as well as how much an individual student improves.

Q: How do colleges look differently at a low grade in an AP class versus a high grade in a regular class?

A: It depends on the college. Some weight AP classes higher and this is a benefit of the all AP or choice AP option. Some students can skip class requirements with a 4 or 5 on the AP test. However, even if you don't take an AP class, the quality of the application essay shows a student's writing level.

Q: Do you have to take the AP test if you take the class?

A: No. However, students are encouraged to do so and don't have to report scores.

Q: Isn't #3 the “Junior English” option just a course change name from AP English?

A: No, because the multiple choice section will not be taught, just essay writing.

Invitation for Open Discuss about AC Matters

The AC leadership also invited parents to bring up any other topics, concerns or questions about the AC program on the Google Doc feedback sheet.

Fundraising Needs for AC

Due to increased spending to support the newly expanded AP program over the past two years, AC funds are at an all-time low. Parents were asked if they had any ideas for raising money to help with the dwindling funds.

AC Advisory Council Representative Jeremy Thorner explained that we need funds to upgrade and provide support for struggling students by hiring and training graders and tutors. The Berkeley High Development Group will not pay for staff positions, thus Mr. Borrelli's Academic Support position at .2FTE must be funded either by the AC budget or an outside grant. BSEP denied his application this year.

Mr. Thorner said that if every AC family donated \$50, we'd be fine. He asked the parents in attendance how would could get more community involvement. Does anyone have experience in corporate fundraising?

Catherine Ference, an AC parent, offered to be the AC e-tree coordinator and work on fundraising through the e-tree. Another parent suggested we be specific about our needs: tell parents our goal, how much additional funds are needed and what we're spending the money on.

AC Advisory Council Elections

Three AC Advisory Council officers ran for re-election. Rakhi Rao ran for treasurer, Johanna Reneke as an at-large council member and Donna Storey ran for secretary. All were re-elected by a unanimous vote of the assembled AC parents.

Online Feedback for Parents

The AC team leaders will post an online feedback form for parents who could not attend the meeting. Details to be announced.

This concludes the report of the meeting. Please attend our Fall Information Night in October 2015.