



Building Equity and Access in AP[®]

From the District to the Classroom





Introduction

Efforts to create systematic change in schools require a concerted effort that involves multiple stakeholders. Strategic planning and an ongoing investment of financial, material, and human resources are all part of the process. Moving the needle towards this goal can be challenging and largely depends on school leader agency, teacher professional development, and community involvement. However, models for success do exist and can serve as a guide to help level the advanced coursework playing field for traditionally marginalized student populations in meaningful ways. This document will examine equity and access from the district level to the classroom.



Solutions & Planning

District Level

At the district level, leaders are tasked with ensuring equity and access in advanced coursework while navigating social, political, and economic challenges. Fortunately, research shows that equity in AP *can* be achieved in school districts and serve as a model for others to follow. A [2016 study](#) examined four New Jersey school districts' efforts to increase the number of students participating in the AP program. It followed the journey of fifteen district and area superintendents who worked together to develop solutions to educational inequities. Some of the problems they encountered included an imbalance in the number of AP classes offered at different high schools, disparities in teacher recommendations based on race and socioeconomic status, the lack of opt-in policies, and the lack of parental knowledge and support of the AP program. The superintendents met monthly to analyze data, observe classrooms, and receive feedback on district approaches to equity and access. They developed strategies to include structural changes in the number of AP courses offered, policy changes (such as eliminating restrictive entrance requirements), and increased professional development for AP educators. But the common factor across all of the districts was their emphasis on community outreach. They helped educators, parents, and other community stakeholders to better understand the benefits of the AP program and enabled them to forge a coalition of support towards increasing equity and access in a systematic manner—a goal that had previously been unattainable.

School Level

At the school level, the first step is to build an AP equity team consisting of the school principal, AP coordinator, department chairs, AP teachers, counselors, and other stakeholders invested in the school's AP program. The team should be diverse, open-minded, and committed to the change process. Initially, the team should review The College Board®'s [Equity and Access Policy Statement](#) and the school's comprehensive improvement plan goals related to equity. These should be compared against the district's mission, vision, and strategic plan. Areas of alignment should then be identified as the team begins developing an equity and access goal that is specific, measurable, and attainable. Schoolwide AP data should be analyzed and include enrollment by course, student demographics by race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, grade level, and disability. Gaps should be identified to reveal schoolwide and classroom-level practices that enhance or restrict student participation in the AP program. Next, the team should discuss any curricular concerns, instructional strategies, and available resources that might help recruit and retain students who have not traditionally had access, or have struggled in AP classes. Finally, the team should create an action plan with a timeline to achieve a specific equity goal that would positively impact the high school's AP program. Best practices include adopting an open enrollment policy, utilizing AP Potential™ to widen the pool of AP students, and developing an AP summer program for incoming freshmen. AP mentoring, teacher professional development, and ongoing parent academies that relay the benefits and progress of the AP program are great options, as well.

Classroom Level

At the classroom level, efforts should be focused on recruiting diverse and highly qualified teachers, training them in effective AP pedagogy, and shaping their mindsets about equity and access. One way to accomplish this is to steer away from qualifying test scores and, instead, move towards research that highlights the benefits of taking AP classes. New research shows that students who score a 1 or 2 on AP exams are still more likely to enroll in and be prepared for a four-year college than academically similar students who do not take AP. They are also more likely to take more AP classes in the future and improve their scores. Discussions about equity and access should avoid traditional gatekeeping mechanisms and should, instead, promote diversity and inclusion. Professional development should be culturally responsive, rigorous, relevant, and train teachers to effectively scaffold and differentiate their lessons. Teachers should utilize formative and summative assessments with supplemental classroom resources, such as AP Classroom and [UWorld's Learning Tools for AP Courses](#). These tools help students develop the critical thinking skills necessary for college level success and UWorld reports on AP progress, usage, and test readiness. Teachers should help students assess their own academic potential as they journey towards success in AP. The College Board's [AP Conversation Starter](#) is a great resource to promote initial conversations among students, teachers, and counselors about the value of AP classes, and to guide students through the planning process.



Summary

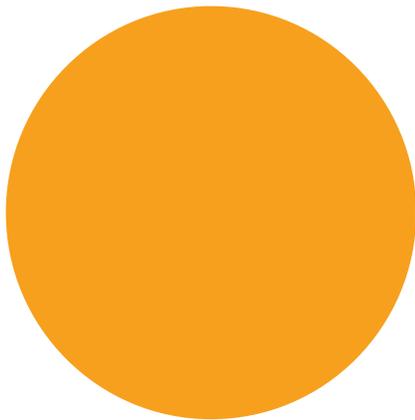
Gaps in college readiness among underrepresented student populations create disparities in healthcare, civic engagement, job productivity, and economic competitiveness. The AP program has proven to serve as a gateway toward academic success for students who might otherwise be excluded from a myriad of opportunities. For this reason, it is prudent for leaders at the district and school level to invest in ample human and financial resources, as well as to shape the mindset of today's educators who are charged with guiding this bright generation of students toward college and career readiness.



Author Biography

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Kenny is an assistant principal in the Henry County (GA) School District and previously taught AP U.S. History for thirteen years in the Rockdale and DeKalb County school districts. He is an AP Reader, APSI Workshop Consultant, and serves on the Consultant Advisory Panel. He has presented on the topics of vertical teams and access and equity at several College Board conferences and recently co-developed a workshop series titled “Achieving Equity in AP.” He loves to spend his free time cooking, reading, traveling, and spending quality time with family.





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