

SYSTEMS FOR SUCCESS: THINKING BEYOND ACCESS TO AP

Successful high-poverty schools offer a clear roadmap for achieving high Advanced Placement performance.

ALHAMBRA HIGH SCHOOL, located in a suburb outside of Los Angeles, and **YES PREP SOUTHWEST** in Houston are two such schools that are not only providing more students access to AP, but helping them succeed.

HERE'S WHAT SCHOOL LEADERS CAN LEARN FROM THEM:

Alhambra High School

LOCATION: ALHAMBRA, CALIFORNIA

2014 AP ACCESS RATE: 35% – 2014 SUCCESS RATE: 68%

SCHOOL SIZE: 2,512 STUDENTS

DEMOGRAPHICS: 1 PERCENT BLACK, 51 PERCENT LATINO, 72 PERCENT LOW-INCOME

Eliminate barriers for students, but back it up with support.

To expand access to more students, schools leaders must be honest about where their barriers exist and what they mean for their most vulnerable students. They should seek to eliminate them, but under conditions that encourage and support students on their AP trajectories.

Systematically support teachers.

Alhambra's practice of sending AP teachers to off-site trainings and then exposing them to AP instruction gradually and with real-time support is a strategy that builds a cadre of teachers who are confident and effective in the classroom.

Employ data to drive change.

Teachers often have lower expectations and perceptions of students not seen as "AP material." Use student data (grades, standardized test scores, AP potential performance or scores on PSAT and SAT) to change mindsets and show teachers their students' capacities to achieve in these rigorous courses.

Optimize the master schedule.

School leaders should ensure there are enough trained teachers to accommodate the number of students requesting courses, and they should organize courses so they don't overlap — thus providing students the opportunity to enroll in courses that match their interests and take advantage of support that is offered outside the classroom.

**Access rate=percentage of students taking at least one AP exam*

**Success rate=percentage of students enrolled in AP who took an AP exam and passed it with a 3 or higher*

YES Prep Southwest

LOCATION: HOUSTON, TEXAS

2014 AP ACCESS RATE: 40% – 2014 SUCCESS RATE: 68%

SCHOOL SIZE: 926 STUDENTS

DEMOGRAPHICS: 10 PERCENT BLACK, 89.5 PERCENT LATINO, 87 PERCENT LOW-INCOME

Hire committed, subject-matter experts, and then help them develop their craft.

School leaders should aim to hire teachers who have degrees in their subject matter content areas and demonstrate a commitment to stay for an extended period of time. Research shows that teachers who display a higher level of content knowledge in their teaching improve the learning outcomes of their students. Then, school leaders should groom these subject matter experts to teach AP courses by providing opportunities to attend AP training sessions and to collaborate with AP colleagues across the school and district.

Build a curriculum that ushers students toward AP.

Preparation for AP begins long before junior or senior year. Courses should be aligned and paced in such a way that students have an opportunity to develop the independent problem-solving and critical-thinking skills needed to succeed in AP. An effective curriculum also accounts for students who come in behind academically by building interventions that bring students up to speed, while also preparing them to be successful in AP.

Create the expectation that all students are suited for AP.

It's no secret that what counts matters the most. By making an AP course a graduation requirement, both students and teachers become fixed on making it happen. Students are more likely to be identified for intervention sooner, supports are established before they're needed, and the question of whether students are "fit" for AP never arises — because all students are.

Systematically support students.

This starts with opening enrollment in AP, but it's continued by providing access to support systems and tutorials that deepen the educational experience and increase their chances of success.



The Education Trust

Read more about how school leaders set up systems within schools to ensure AP success at www.EdTrust.org/BeyondAPAccess.