In the following report, Hanover Research examines literature on the impact of AP exam fee subsidies on student participation and performance, and the cost-effectiveness of such policies. After a discussion of best practices to increasing AP participation and performance among traditionally underrepresented students, the report concludes with profiles of large, diverse school districts that have adopted different strategies to successfully expanding the AP program while maintaining passing rates.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

In the following report, Hanover examines literature on AP exam fee subsidies and their impact on AP exam participation and performance (with a passing score defined as 3 or above) and the cost-effectiveness of such policies. In particular, this report analyzes empirical studies that examine whether or not subsidies are effective in reducing barriers to the AP among low-income, minority student populations. The report also reviews several best practices for addressing barriers to AP exam participation and success, in conjunction with fee subsidization. Finally, it concludes with profiles of two large school districts with substantial low-income and minority student populations, examining their AP exam fee policies and other successful strategies they have adopted to raise both AP participation and performance.

KEY FINDINGS

- Districts seeking to expand access to the AP have traditionally used full or partial subsidies—determined by factors such as student academic performance or financial need—to remove cost barriers for at-risk students. While the College Board and US Department of Education distribute financial assistance to most states to support FRL students, state and local education agencies may develop further criteria for determining which students require financial assistance. While in some cases, districts are able to cover 100 percent of exam fees for all students, others generally target low-income and minority populations in an effort to close the achievement gap.

- The effectiveness of AP exam fee reductions on AP participation and success remains unclear. While one on hand, critics argue that subsidies increase neither participation nor performance, experts generally conclude that, in the least, they increase the number of test-takers and tests taken per student. The impact on student success, however, is less conclusive. Overall, research shows that when student participation rises, the rate of passing scores decreases – at least initially.

- The failure of students to succeed on AP exams despite increased participation can be attributed to several factors. For one, in schools where AP exams are subsidized, students may perceive a lower financial risk and take the exam without necessary course preparation. Additionally, efforts to increase participation may lead to lowered rigor and selectivity, resulting in a greater number of lower-performing students taking the exam. These outcomes signal a negative return on investment for both the student and the district, and signal that exam fee subsidization alone is insufficient to prepare students to succeed on college-level exams.

- In order to ensure that passing scores increase along with participation, experts suggest a more comprehensive set of strategies to support student subgroups who have historically been underrepresented in AP exam participation. These strategies
include offering pre-AP programs, identifying potential students for AP, vertical teaming between teachers across grade levels, and training more teachers in AP content to raise academic standards across students’ course load.
SECTION I: LITERATURE REVIEW

POSITIVE TRENDS IN AP PARTICIPATION

The College Board’s 10th Annual Report to the Nation notes that 33.2 percent of public high school graduates took an AP exam in 2013 (the most recent year for which data are available), compared to 18.9 percent in 2003. Further, in 2013, 20.1 percent of high school graduates earned a score of 3 or higher on at least one exam, compared to 12.2 percent in 2003.1 During the same time period, the proportion of test-takers scoring a 3, 4, or 5—passing scores that result in college credit being awarded—has declined by only 4 percent, from 64.5 percent to 60.5 percent.2 In other words, although the percentage of test-takers has grown over the past decade, the percentage of test-takers earning college credit on at least one exam has remained relatively stable.

Similar trends were seen in the state of Nevada. Figure 1.1 displays the share of Nevada high school graduates who took an AP exam and those who passed at least one exam, among the graduating classes of 2003, 2008, and 2013. In both cases, the percentage of students with favorable outcomes has increased over the past decade.3

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Among low-income and Hispanic/Latino students in Nevada, the share of high school graduates who took an AP exam and those who passed at least one exam also increased across each five-year period (Figure 1.2 and Figure 1.3). The share of graduates from low-income backgrounds who took an AP exam during high school rose from 7.7 percent in 2003 to 33 percent in 2013, while the share of those passing an exam during high school rose from 5.2 to 27.5 percent. Across the same period, the share of Hispanic/Latino graduates taking an AP exam rose from 9.9 to 26.7 percent, while the share of those passing an exam rose from 10.2 to 23.7 percent.

**Figure 1.2: Percentage of Nevada Graduates from Low-Income Backgrounds Participating in and Passing an AP exam**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage Taking AP</th>
<th>Percentage Passing AP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>33.0%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The College Board

Note: The percentage of low-income graduates may be slightly inflated due to changes in criteria by which students are classified as FRL and low-income.

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5 Ibid., p. 8.
6 Ibid., p. 10.
7 Ibid., p. 8.
PASSING RATES: A CLOSER LOOK

Despite these seemingly positive results released by the College Board, there are somewhat concerning trends in national AP data as well. For instance, between 2003 and 2013, the total number of AP exams taken by high school graduates more than doubled, from 1,328,511 to 3,153,014 (137 percent increase). However, the total number of AP exam scores of 1 or 2 rose substantially as well (158 percent increase) while the total number of AP exam scores of 3 or higher rose at a slower pace (124 percent increase). Further, during this time period, although the number of low-income examinees increased exponentially, by 372 percent, the growth in the total number of AP examinees with only scores of 1 or 2 outpaced the growth of the number of AP examinees with scores of 3 or greater (117 percent and 83 percent, respectively). Thus, although access to AP exams has greatly increased over the past 10 years, this increase does not appear to correlate to a proportionate increase in positive outcomes for test-takers (Figure 1.4).9

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8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., p. 7.
Figure 1.4: National AP Participation and Passing Rates, 2003-2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2003 Graduates</th>
<th>2013 Graduates</th>
<th>Increase</th>
<th>Percentage Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>AP Test Takers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total AP Examinees</td>
<td>514,163</td>
<td>1,003,430</td>
<td>489,267</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total AP Low-Income Examinees</td>
<td>58,489</td>
<td>275,864</td>
<td>217,375</td>
<td>372%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total AP Examinees with only scores &lt;3</td>
<td>182,429</td>
<td>395,925</td>
<td>213,496</td>
<td>117%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total AP Examinees with at Least One Score of 3+</td>
<td>331,734</td>
<td>607,505</td>
<td>275,771</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Exams by Test Taker</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AP Exam Scores</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total AP exams</td>
<td>1,328,511</td>
<td>3,153,014</td>
<td>1,824,503</td>
<td>137%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total AP exam scores &lt;3</td>
<td>521,620</td>
<td>1,345,988</td>
<td>824,368</td>
<td>158%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total AP Exam scores 3+</td>
<td>806,891</td>
<td>1,807,026</td>
<td>1,000,135</td>
<td>124%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: College Board and Hanover Research.

In part due to these trends, some policymakers have been less positive about AP exam outcomes and the use of exam subsidies. Within Nevada, for example, one independent source explains that the state’s AP passage rates “fell from 64 percent in 2001 to 56 percent in 2011,” and many critics consider the exam subsidy a waste of taxpayer dollars.10 As a result, states that grant subsidies to students must consider whether it is worth shouldering more of the cost in order to maintain access to the AP. The challenge for the coming decade will be to balance the need to ensure that more, and more diverse, students have the opportunity to take AP courses with that of helping a greater share of the existing pool of students to pass the exam.11

**AP EXAM FEE REDUCTION POLICIES**

States and districts vary widely in their policies regarding AP exam fees, which totaled $92 per exam during the 2015-16 academic year.12 In some cases, students pay the entire fee, or more than the full fee in order to cover the costs of administration and proctoring.13 Most states receive federal grants through the Advanced Placement Test Fee (APTF) program, to

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fully or partially cover fees for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch (FRL) students. Grants are based on the anticipated number of AP tests taken in a state, and in 2015, the U.S. Department of Education announced an allotment of $296,978 to Nevada’s Department of Education. In Nevada, AP exam fees are largely subsidized for eligible low-income students, who are required to pay only $12 per exam.

Ultimately designed to remove barriers to traditionally underrepresented students, the grants serve to increase the number of low-income students participating in and passing AP exams. Students typically receive college credit for passing scores on AP exams, which means that they may have the opportunity to complete their undergraduate education earlier and save on tuition. The College Board also covers a portion of the fees for FRL students, leaving state and local education agencies to address the remaining costs. Furthermore, because many non-FRL students still require financial assistance, districts must decide which students meet the criteria to qualify for fee reductions.

**EFFECTIVENESS OF AP EXAM FEE SUBSIDIES**

The effectiveness of subsidizing AP exam fees is a point of ongoing debate. While some research and case studies endorse the use of subsidies as a promising strategy for expanding access to AP coursework and thereby reducing socioeconomic gaps in college readiness, other researchers conclude that these strategies are ineffective.

For instance, in a longitudinal survey of 65 North Carolina school districts over an eight-year period (2003-2004 to 2010-2011), Batten et al (2012) examined the impact of exam incentives on student participation and success in AP courses and exams. The districts were grouped into three categories, as offering no subsidy, partial subsidy, and complete subsidy for eligible students. Regarding the impact of AP exam subsidies on AP course enrollment, the study found that districts that introduced full subsidies began experiencing yearly enrollment growth, and that the growth rate surpassed “the state average from the 2006-2007 to 2010-2011 school years” (Figure 1.5). Likewise, fully subsidized exam fees were positively correlated with AP exam participation. The study found that while offering partial support...

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21 Ibid.
subsidies had no impact on raising exam participation, offering full subsidies led to an increase in the number of AP exams taken, resulting in “nine additional exams taken per 1000 ADM (Average Daily Membership) (Figure 1.5).”

Figure 1.5: Regression Results: AP Course Participation and Grades

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>COURSES PER 1000 ADM</th>
<th>PERCENT B OR BETTER IN AP COURSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
<td>P-Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Subsidy</td>
<td>-16.3</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial Subsidy</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>.464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT Participation Rate</td>
<td>.575</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average SAT Score</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per-pupil Expenditures (Thousands)</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2009</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2010</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2011</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Native American</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent African American</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Hispanic</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Poor</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NC Public Schools

Figure 1.6: Regression Results: AP Exam Participation and Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXAMS PER 1000 ADM</th>
<th>PERCENT 3 OR BETTER (AP EXAMS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Subsidy</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial Subsidy</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT Participation</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average SAT Score</td>
<td>.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per-pupil Expenditures (Thousands)</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADM</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2005</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2006</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Poor</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NC Public Schools

Despite increased enrollment in AP exams among those schools that offered full subsidies, students from schools with full subsidies were 3.2 percent less likely to receive a passing score of 3 or better on their exams (Figure 1.5). Further, students from full-subsidy schools were 16.3 less likely to participate in AP courses, suggesting that, although students registered for the exams at higher rates in subsidy schools, there was no corresponding increase in course enrollment (Figure 1.6). Thus, many students in these schools were likely

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22 Ibid., p. 5.
23 Ibid., pp. 4-5.
24 Ibid., p. 5.
to have taken AP exams without also taking the corresponding coursework, which could explain these students’ lower overall performance on the AP exams.

A recent study conducted by McBride Davis et al (2015) evaluated the cost-effectiveness of AP exam subsidies for disadvantaged minorities by comparing the overall value of passing scores (3 or above) with the cost of non-passing scores (1 and 2). Specifically, the authors examined AP exam data and test expenditures for Black students in three states (Texas, New York, and Florida) over the 16-year period from 1997 to 2012.25

During the examined period, all three states had established some form of financial incentive program to increase AP participation and college readiness and reduce the socioeconomic achievement gap. In all three states, the number of overall test takers and exams passed increased significantly by 2012.26 For example, Florida’s state-funded incentive program allows for teachers to earn a $50 bonus per pupil scoring a 3 or higher on an AP exam. Under this system, the number of exams taken quadrupled during the decade leading up to 2008, with passage rates increasing by 169 percent across the state.27

The positive results of incentive programs in these states, however, failed to materialize among Black students. The study showed that for every year and in all three states, the number of Black students participating in an exam increased but the exam passage rate decreased.28 Of central significance was the fact that the number AP exams failed surpassed the number of AP exams passed among this student group.29 The consistent underperformance signaled “a negative return on the investment in exam fees” and implied that financial assistance programs offered no benefit to the majority of Black students, a conclusion that may be extended with some caution to students of other minorities.30

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., p. 142.
28 Ibid., p. 149.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., p. 146.
Moreover, the authors argue that incentive programs were not cost-effective for states, as financial support for AP exams, which “exceeded $3 million annually” and increased over the years to cover the rise in test-takers from disadvantaged backgrounds, was met with “persistent deficits in reaching benchmarks.”

However, not all empirical evidence on incentive effectiveness is negative. In one study, Jeong (2009) examined whether two types of financial incentives – state-sponsored exam fee subsidies and performance-based incentives – had any impact on AP exam participation

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31 Ibid., pp. 147–148.
32 Ibid., p. 145.
33 Ibid., p. 146.
and/or achievement. Using nationally representative AP exam data from the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002, Jeong observed exam results in four subjects: English literature, calculus AB, US history, and biology. The analyses revealed little to no evidence that performance-based incentives had a positive causal effect on exam participation and success. **On the other hand, state-sponsored fee subsidies yielded more optimistic findings**, leading to the conclusion that “AP test fee exemption is related to a significant increase in the odds of AP exam participation of the course enrollees, for socioeconomically disadvantaged populations in particular.”

The author acknowledges the criticism that fee exemptions and subsidies do not adequately address the achievement gap, which boils down to a persistent lack of quality academic preparation, rather than financial impediments. However, even among students enrolled in AP courses, monetary costs can determine whether an economically disadvantaged student decides to participate in the exam. Therefore, Jeong concludes that **fee subsidies are an “effective policy instrument to reduce socioeconomic disparities in AP exam participation and thereby broaden access to further educational opportunities leading to social equality.”**

**BEST PRACTICES**

Based on scholarly research and school district experiences, it appears that exam subsidies intended to increase student access to the AP examination generally result in higher rates of exam participation. More students than ever are taking AP exams, and these students are also electing to take a higher number of AP exams. Yet the correlation between subsidies and exam success is less clear, as higher participation tends to be accompanied by a decrease in the share of exams passed, at least initially, even if the volume of exams passed may have gone up.

The negative relationship between AP exam participation and achievement can potentially be attributed to several different factors. For one, when exam costs are eliminated, students may view the exam as a risk-free or low-risk opportunity to earn college credit. In districts that do not require course enrollment as a prerequisite to the exam, students are thus less likely to enroll in the corresponding AP course or prepare for a given exam by self-directed means. A second explanation is that as schools strive to expand access to the AP through open enrollment policies and push more students to participate, they may lower

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35 Ibid.


38 Ibid.
their selectivity and allow less qualified students to enroll in AP courses and take the AP exam.  

Not all states and school districts have experienced this trend. For example, Pflugerville Independent School District in Texas saw a significant rise in the number of students in taking at least one AP exam over the past four years, yet was able to maintain its exam passage rates without significant initial dips in exam performance. District leaders attributed this to a combination of factors in addition to subsidizing fees for eligible students, such as communicating early with parents and students, “identifying students for pre-AP courses while in middle school, enrolling students in the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, [and] coordinating efforts by teachers and campus leaders to support students.” In other words, a comprehensive menu of support that proactively develops student potential, combined with fee subsidies to increase access to the exam, may be key in preparing students for success on the AP. 

**REQUIRING AP COURSE ENROLLMENT**

While financial incentives appear to produce partial or mixed results, they are not entirely ineffective. In combination with other policies and strategies tailored to specific districts, AP exam fee subsidies show promise in raising both exam participation and performance. This is particularly true among disadvantaged student populations, for whom the exam is largely seen as a financial risk. 

Some proponents of the subsidy suggest that, in order to mitigate the decline in pass rates while encouraging students complete the necessary academic preparation, districts should require students to enroll in an AP course as a precondition to receiving a fee subsidy for the corresponding exam. At the same time, districts should exercise caution when placing students into AP courses. Open enrollment policies to increase exam participation have raised concerns about overenrolling students in AP courses at the expense of selectivity, and consequently, performance outcomes. Such was the case in Florida’s Hillsborough school district, which quadrupled the number of students enrolling in AP exams over the course of a decade – a move that may have been driven by pressure to improve rankings within the state, which weighs both AP exam participation and achievement – but experienced a dramatic drop in passage rates.

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[41] Ibid.
While some criticize the dilution of selectivity and rigor that originally underlay the AP, others maintain that exposing students to AP courses improves the quality of an entire school. According to one district leader in Chester County, which uses fee subsidies to boost low-income student participation, as more teachers are being trained to teach AP and pre-AP courses, they naturally apply some of the same practices and expectations in other classes. This raises the overall standard of excellence, thereby contributing to a more academically competitive environment.

**COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT**

Many experts note that fee subsidization, while helpful, is not in itself sufficient to close the achievement gap. Because they serve to remove financial barriers but do not address students’ lack of academic preparation or confidence, they may be more effective in combination with other services and supports. These include offering pre-AP programs that prepare traditionally underrepresented students for college-level coursework, such as the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program. Other approaches focus on teachers, such as AP-oriented professional development and vertical teaming, in which teachers of a specific content area collaborate across grade levels to “equip students with the necessary foundational skills at each grade level, through vertical alignment of the curriculum,” to succeed in the AP course.

Drawing on the effective strategies implemented by various school districts to increase AP participation and success, the Broad Foundation assesses a set of practices and their efficacy in expanding AP access. Several components of successful AP expansion include:

- Identifying prospective AP students: Administering the PSAT/NMSQT to identify potential high performers, offering new AP courses based on student potential and interest.
- Improving student preparation and support: Establishing early AP preparation programs (AVID, Springboard), or AP “catch-up” programs such as weekend tutoring sessions.
- Increasing teacher training and support: Training up more AP teachers, or partnering with local institutions to host summer AP training institutes.
- Offering monetary and non-monetary incentives to students and teachers: In addition to subsidizing AP exam fees for low-income students, these include covering PSAT/NMSQT registration costs, hosting events to celebrate students’ AP achievement, and offering bonuses to AP teachers based on student exam achievement.

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45 Ibid.
47 AVID. http://www.avid.org/default.aspx
SECTION II: INSTITUTIONAL PROFILES

The following section examines two large, high-minority school districts that have adopted different strategies to successfully increasing AP exam participation and performance among low-income and minority students. In 2013, both districts were among six recognized by the Broad Foundation for raising the share of African-American students taking an exam, while simultaneously maintaining or increasing the share of the population passing an exam.

SAN DIEGO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Located in San Diego, California, San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) is a large district enrolling over 130,000 students in 238 schools. SDUSD has a large minority student population, with its largest minority groups being Hispanic (46.5 percent), African American (10 percent), and Asian/Pacific Islander (14 percent). As a participant of the Advanced Placement Incentive Program (APIP) in the six years leading up to 2011, SDUSD directed a $5 million federal grant to expand its AP program, improve teacher training, and prepare more low-income students for AP courses and exams.

EXPANDING ACCESS TO THE AP

To strategically expand access to the AP, SDUSD hired a counselor to analyze school schedules and make sure that the most challenging classes were available to every student at every school in the district. Subsequently, some of the smaller schools were merged with larger ones in order to offer students a broader menu of AP subjects. Furthermore, between the 2008-2009 and 2010-2011 school years, the district expanded the number of AP course offerings by 21 percent, and the number of AP sections offered by 37 percent.

STUDENT AND TEACHER PREPARATION

Through the APIP, SDUSD significantly increased number of students participating in student enrichment, college preparation, and career development activities. It also adopted the AVID program to identify and cultivate high-potential students for advanced coursework. Teachers also received targeted professional development during the program.

51 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
55 “The Few, the Proud, the Bold: Gaining Ground on College & Career Readiness for All Students.” AVID. http://www.avid.org/dl/eve_natcon/nc11_thefewtheproudthebold_presentation.pdf
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
particular, the district “emphasized cultural proficiency in professional development to ensure AP teachers are effective in diverse classes.”

Over the course of the grant’s implementation, the district found a significant in the share of all students enrolling in an AP course and passing at least one AP exam (Figure 2.1). Notable percentage growth was seen in exam performance among AVID, low-income, and Hispanic.

**Figure 2.1: Percent Change in AP Course Enrollments and Exam Passage, 2008/09-2010/11**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All students</th>
<th>AP COURSE ENROLLMENT, PERCENT CHANGE</th>
<th>AP EXAM PASSAGE, PERCENT CHANGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-Income</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVID Program students</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: AVID

According to Assistant Superintendent Sid Salazar, the Advanced Placement Incentive Program, combined with SDUSD’s strategies, was “responsible for the district’s improved outcomes for African-American students.” Unfortunately, many districts, including SDUSD, were recently unable to renew their grants due to widespread budget cuts, and have had to scale back their AP programs.

**ORANGE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Located in Orange County, Florida, Orange County Public Schools (OCPS) is one of the nation’s largest school districts, encompassing 257 schools and enrolling 198,861 students. A high-minority district, OCPS’s largest minority groups are African-American (28 percent), Hispanic (38 percent), and Asian (five percent).

In addition to being identified by the Broad Foundation for expanding access to the AP, 2014 marked its third year of making the College Board’s District Honor Roll, which recognizes districts that expanded access to AP courses and exams while successfully maintaining or

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60 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
increasing the share of all students passing the AP exam. Although exam subsidies are covered by the state, OCPS has implemented a comprehensive set of strategies to raising participation and performance, including stakeholder engagement and increasing academic support and professional development.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

According to the Broad Foundation, the lack of AP participation among African-American students with high potential in mathematics is attributed largely to two factors – a lack of access to the course, and lack of confidence. As one way of addressing these issues, OCPS schools sought to increase stakeholder engagement as a means of raising awareness and confidence in taking the AP. In addition to “student advising and parent outreach,” the district invited families of students whose PSAT scores showed high AP potential “to an annual AP Parent Night... to outline the benefits of AP as an edge in college admissions and as a time- and money-saver if credit is obtained.”

DELIVERING IMPROVED SUPPORT TO STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

According to the district’s deputy superintendent Jesus Jara, the district seeks to provide and communicate extra support to students and teachers, so that increased access to AP courses is not accompanied by declining exam scores, as is often the case. One of OCPS’s student-centered supports involves “funding six-week ‘AP Camps’ on Saturdays leading up to the exams [and] paying teachers to provide additional preparation and providing student transportation” to the test site.

Teacher support and training are a core component of effective AP expansion at OCPS. As a requirement to teaching AP courses, the district sends teachers to attend a five-day College Board AP Summer Institute. In recent years, it began providing student-level data and training teachers and staff to use the data strategically. The information is consolidated in a database called the Educational Data Warehouse, which includes “performance trends on entire classrooms and information on whether individual students pursue advanced coursework and are on the path to college readiness.” Teachers can examine high school students’ PSAT and ACT scores – along with demographic, attendance, behavioral, and

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65 “Orange County Public Schools Placed on College Board’s 5th Annual AP District Honor Roll for Significant Gains.” Orange County Public Schools, 2014. https://www.ocps.net/es/cr/newsroom/News%20Releases%202014/Orange%20County%20Public%20Schools%20placed%20on%20the%205th%20Annual%20AP%20District%20Honor%20Roll.pdf


69 Ibid.


regular assessment data – to identify and encourage high-potential students to enroll in AP courses. As early as middle school, teachers can proactively identify strong performers and administer a diagnostic SAT to set them on the path towards accelerated learning.

Over the last several years, the participation and passing rates of minority students at OCPS have remained steady or risen. Among African American students between 2008 and 2011, the district saw a one percentage point increase in participation, and a one percentage point increase in passage. Among Hispanic students between 2011 and 2013, it reported a seven percentage point increase in participation, and a three percentage point increase in passage.

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73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
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