
A.P. AND I.B. PROGRAMS: A “FIT” FOR ALL GIFTED LEARNERS?

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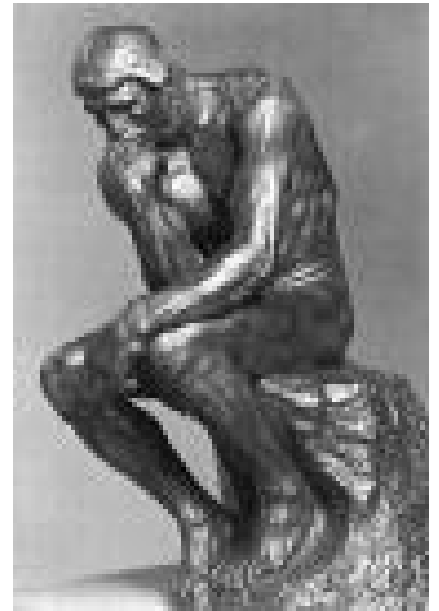
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Background and Philosophies of the Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate Programs



Advanced Placement Courses

- Response to Ford Foundation early college entrance program (provided scholarships to high school sophomores to attend college early)--1952
 - Not developed as a program or courses for gifted students or with any specific philosophy of gifted programming—were simply college courses offered at high school level for “motivated students”
 - Originally for seniors only
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International Baccalaureate

- Response to international educators who were looking for a standard international college preparatory program with standard international college entrance exam
 - “A rigorous pre-university course of study leading to examinations, that meets the needs of highly motivated and ***academically gifted students***” (International Baccalaureate North America, 1986)
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International Baccalaureate

- “Course of study” leading to a degree
 - Course offered in 6 areas
 - First Language
 - Second Language
 - Experimental Sciences
 - Mathematics
 - Study of Man in Society
 - Sixth Study
 - Common course: Theory of Knowledge
 - Required Extended Essay
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Growth of the Advanced Placement Program and International Baccalaureate Programs



Advanced Placement

- 1955-56: 1229 students in 104 schools taking 2199 exams; 130 participating colleges
 - In 2004, 1,081,1021,017 students from 15,000+ high schools taking 1,737,231 exams; 3435 participating colleges
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2002 AP exam takers:

- White/Caucasian: 65.3%
- Mexican American, Puerto Rican, & Hispanic (combined): 9.7%
- African American: 4.4%

(College Board, 2004)

INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE

- # 20 Schools 1970;
 - # 617 offer the diploma program now (2008 IB website)
 - # Approximately 800 Colleges recognize
 - # 50,000 Students
-



Potential Explanations for Increased Enrollment in Advanced Placement Courses and International Baccalaureate Programs



Increased enrollment because:

- Readily available course descriptions and teachers' guides, workshops and summer institutes.
- Lack of other rigorous and challenging options in secondary schools.
- Support for AP/IB by governors, state legislatures and departments of education.
- Financial support for taking AP courses and

exams, 2002

In announcing \$1.3 million incentive grant to Little Rock schools on 4/12/2004, Secretary Paige said:

“Taking tough courses pays off. Research shows that students who take challenging courses are more likely to obtain a college degree.”

<http://www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2004/04/04122004.html>

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Then-Governor Bush stated: “Making Advanced Placement available to students across Texas is one of the best ways to challenge students academically” (The College Entrance Examination Board and Educational Testing Service, 1999a, p. 16).

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Increased enrollment because:

- Financial support for taking AP courses and exams.
 - Pressure to counter the trend for increased time to complete the baccalaureate degree and stress on entering graduate or professional school early.
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Financial Incentives



- FLORIDA: \$50 teacher bonus for each student receiving a 3 or higher on an AP exam-- \$500 in low-performing schools for teachers who have at least one student get a 3 or higher on AP exam
- 18 states provide direct assistance for exam fees
- Bush's fiscal year 2005 budget includes 119% increase for the AP incentives program, from \$23.5 million to \$51.5 million (teacher training, development of pre-AP courses, coordination and articulation between grade levels to prepare students for academic achievement in Advanced Placement classes, books and supplies, and participation in online Advanced Placement courses).

Increased enrollment because:

Widely held beliefs:

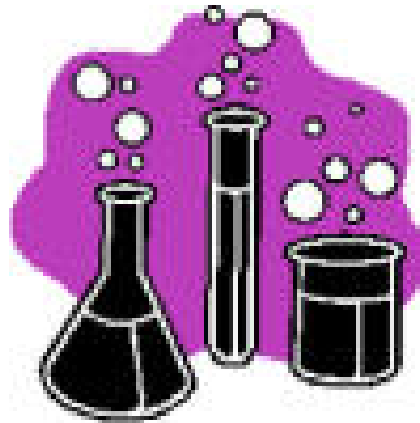
- Belief in the advantage of enrollment in AP or IB courses in the college admissions process.
 - Recommended frequently in literature (e.g., Feldhusen, 1995; Poelzer & Feldhusen, 1997; Pyryt, Masharov, & Feng, 1993)
 - Quality of curriculum
 - Level of challenge and learning environment
 - AP/IB programs seen as indicators of school quality
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Newsweek, 2003: The 100 Best High Schools in America

- http://www.csh.k12.ny.us/highschool/data/100_best_high_schools_in_america.htm

Public schools are ranked according to a ratio called the Challenge Index devised by Jay Mathews: the number of Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate tests taken by all students at a school in 2002 divided by the number of graduating seniors.

Research on AP & IB Courses



Research on Advanced Placement

- Limited in scope and design
 - Surveys of student satisfaction (Casserly, 1986; Hebel, 1999)
 - Teacher opinion (CEEB, 1986; Milewski & Gillie, 2002)
 - Limited research comparing performance of students of equal ability who took AP credit and those who took standard introductory courses
 - Morgan & Crone (1993)
 - Morgan & Ramquist (1998)
 - Breland & Oltamn (2001)
 - NRC (2002)
 - Burton, Whitman, Yepes-Baraya, Cline, Kim (2002)
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Research on International Baccalaureate

- Also limited
 - Feldhusen and Poelzer (1996)
 - Grexa (1988)
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Recent Review of Advanced Studies Programs

- *Learning and understanding: Improving the advanced study of mathematics and science in US high schools (NRC, 2002)*
 - Raise questions about the appropriateness of AP and IB curriculum
 - Depth of coverage
 - Use as a measure of school quality
 - Examinations
 - Preparedness
 - Equity issues
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Advanced Placement

- No studies on the appropriateness of curriculum and instruction in AP and IB courses for gifted adolescent learners
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- Because of the paucity of the research on the effectiveness of AP and IB programs, the under-representation of minority students in these programs, and its increasing use and power in high schools across the nation, we are investigating what is going on in these programs, and how students— both those in the courses and those who opted out of them— experience these courses.
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Research Questions

- How do teachers conceptualize and implement curriculum, instruction, and assessment for high-end learners in AP and IB classrooms?
 - To what extent do the environments created by AP and IB programs and courses meet the needs of gifted learners, including those from traditionally underserved populations?
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Methodology

Methodology

- Grounded Theory Approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998)
 - Systematic inquiry– data analysis and data collection in constant conversation
 - Data analyzed, preliminary theory developed and tested in five additional sites
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Sample

- 22 high schools from 9 states
 - Began study with 17 sites
 - Adding 5 sites to test theory once developed
 - High schools represent varied metropolitan areas, student SES, cultural groups, scope of programs (AP, IB, both AP and IB, other services)
 - Approximately 150 teachers, 250 students, 20 administrators/coordinators, 8 counselors (thus far)
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Data Sources

- Classroom observations
 - Interviews:
 - Teacher interviews (individual and focus groups)
 - Focus group interviews with participating students
 - Interviews with eligible but non-participating students (focus groups and individual)
 - Administrator interviews
 - Document analysis
 - Observer field notes
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So... what did we learn?



AP and IB Teacher Themes

Interviewed AP and IB teachers:

- ❑ Are generally of veteran status
 - ❑ View teaching assignment as a reward for previous teaching success
 - ❑ Say they are challenged by teaching AP and IB
 - ❑ Are described by students as dedicated, hardworking, and highly motivated– as “good teachers”
 - ❑ Enjoy teaching AP and IB classes over other types of classes
 - ❑ Are inconsistently trained in AP and gifted learners
 - ❑ Characterize their AP training as “insufficient”
 - ❑ Feel pressure to teach to the exams
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Student voices: IB teachers

“I have enjoyed the teachers. I think they are some of the best teachers I’ve ever had in high school or anything. I think they’re great teachers.” (Student Interview, Lakeland HS)

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Student Voices: AP teachers

“That class was my seventh hour. I looked forward to that every day; the teacher is incredible. He’s got, I mean, energy that just flows around the room with him. He’s an amazing guy, and... I still go talk to him. I just really enjoyed my time in that class.” (Student Interview, Mill Valley HS)

Student Voices: AP teachers

“She uses a curriculum that is way below AP level or even honors level... she’s used to dealing with kids who don’t want to learn anything, and that’s kind of the way she treats us. I feel like she treats us like we’re in elementary school.” (Student Interview, Mill Valley HS)

Exam Pressure



“When you keep hearing, you know, you’ve got to make these scores, you’ve got to have this many pass... you keep finding yourself going back to that idea of... okay, I’ve got to teach them this, this, and this, and well, this part of this isn’t tested, so I’ll leave that out and I’ll teach it to them next year.” (Teacher Interview, Swingback HS)

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Exam Emphasis

“Sometimes you can get into good discussions, although you don’t have a whole lot of time to divert from the content.” (Teacher Interview, Marshall HS)



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Exam Emphasis

“You don’t stop for anything. I mean that’s a train going one way and it’s not stopping for anything.” (Student Interview, Azalea HS)



Exam emphasis

“Our teacher spent so much time worrying about whether or not we were going to meet the time limit for the exam that we skimmed over everything.” (Student Interview, Mill Valley HS)

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A look into AP/IB classrooms...



Curriculum/ Instruction in AP and IB Classrooms...

CURRICULUM:

- ✓ Determined by the tests, course guides

EXPECTATIONS/CHALLENGE:

- ✓ Generally high expectations of students from both teachers and the students themselves
- ✓ Level of challenge varies from course to course but is generally high

INSTRUCTION:

- ✓ Quality/mode of instruction varies from classroom to classroom
 - ✓ Dominated by fast-paced instruction, lecture, Q&A
 - ✓ Overall emphasis is on exam (test prep)– particularly in month before exam
 - ✓ Teachers perceive students as homogeneous group– “one-size-fits-all” instruction– not much flexibility for individual differences
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Teacher Perception of Student Homogeneity

“When they get to the AP level classes, then everybody’s the same, pretty much. It’s much more homogeneous, and they’re always expecting you to teach to a much higher level.”

“When teaching AP students, you don’t have to spend time filling gaps and catching people up, and so you spend more time looking at things more in-depth.”

Perception of class as ‘college level’

“In a college-level class, I don’t feel like I should have to, you know, look over their shoulders that much.” (5/24/01; FG7, p.8)

AP classes: After the AP exam

- Relaxed atmosphere
 - Teacher responses varied-- mixture of doing nothing, watching movies, being more relaxed, time to investigate topics of interest
 - Scheduling factors interfere with having regular class time
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After the exams...

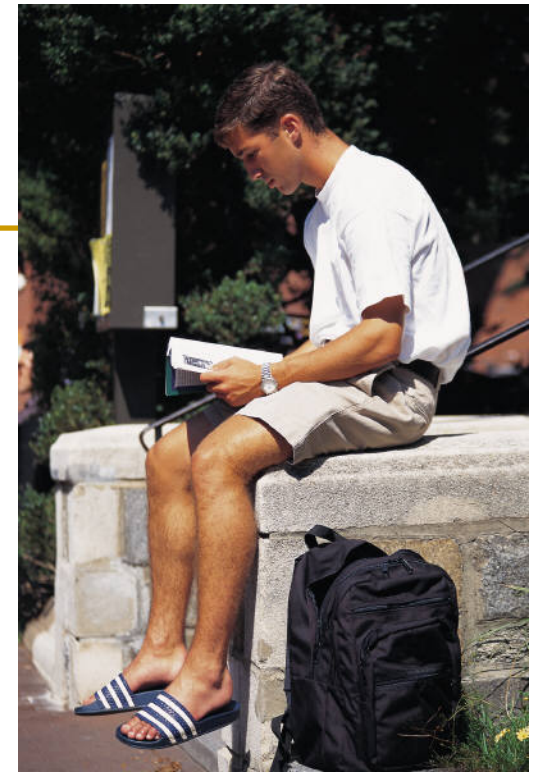
“Alarming, it seemed that most of the AP teachers had really stopped teaching. I know there were 10 days of school left when we were there, but it seemed like such an incredible waste of time...” (*Researcher Field Notes, Oleander HS*)



Student Themes

STUDENTS IN AP CLASSES:

WHO ARE THEY?



CHALLENGE-SEEKING

MOTIVATED

CONFIDENT

WELL -
PREPARED



COMPLIANT

MULTI-TASKERS

HIGH ACHIEVERS

GOOD TIME MANAGERS

“ The successful AP student is highly disciplined, confident, lacking in fear...and self-driven. They want to succeed and if they are not succeeding they talk to me about it.”

Teacher interview – Swingback High School

“I want to be better than my mom and my grandma, because everyone in my family is so smart. My grandma has like seven diplomas, and my mother’s going to be a PhD in economics. I want to be better than them.”

(Student Interview, Wallace High School)

“It’s not like we don’t go out and party like normal high school students because we do. It’s just that we don’t do it every single night, every single weekend. I mean there is such a thing as moderation...we have different priorities.”

Student Focus Group – Swingback High School

Student Perceptions of AP

“The Legend of AP”



Starring: The College Board

Overall, most interviewed students believed that AP and IB classes:

- Are **NECESSARY**
 - Will deliver anticipated benefits
-

Five Areas of Perceived Benefit

- ✓ More challenging than regular courses
 - ✓ Better chance of getting into good college
 - ✓ Preparation for success in college
 - ✓ Exemption from introductory college courses
 - ✓ Sharing classes with others of similar motivation and interest in excelling in school.
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Increased Challenge

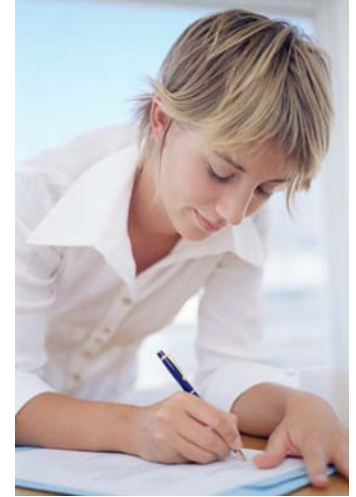
- Students believe they are receiving **the best possible education** in AP/IB courses.
- Students believe that AP/IB teachers are the strongest in their schools.
- Students believe that AP/IB courses maintain a faster pace, are more engaging, and go into greater depth than other courses.



“In my other classes we move very, very, very slowly.”

“I think the teachers are better, the students are better, and what they go over in class is a lot more thorough. You go into a lot more depth.”

Admission to Prestigious Colleges/Universities



“This looks good on college applications and stuff. This is what gets you into college.”

Oleander High School

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“Nowadays, you need to take AP classes if you want to be competitive, and not only take AP classes, but take diverse AP classes.”

Student Interview, Marshall HS



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Expect return on their investments...

“You know that it will all pay off in the end when college will seem slack because I’ve been working so hard.”

Student Interview, Short River HS



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Enjoy being with motivated students...

“ (I) appreciate not being bothered with classmates that didn’t want to be there.”

Student Interview, Swingback HS

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“I knew that the other kids signing up would be motivated kids and it would do me good to hang out with them. I wanted to hang out with people like that. You push each other. You take pride in the things that you do. The peer group is much more enjoyable to be around.”

Student Interview, Wallace HS

Because students buy into “The Legend of AP & IB,” they do not question how courses are taught or what is taught.



Students...



- are largely satisfied with their AP & IB classes in meeting their need for rigorous, challenging academics.
 - know that they have to perform in a certain way in AP & IB classes or they will not be successful.
 - don't feel entitled to instruction geared toward their individual needs— don't seem aware that there is any other way to learn.
-

“If a student chooses to be in AP classes it is supposed to be a college level course. So I found that most teachers try and gear it toward that level. You just have to get it. They won’t try and dumb it down.”



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- don't seem to consider whether there are alternative teaching and instructional techniques that would provide a better fit for individual interests and learning styles.
 - take responsibility for their lack of success— don't blame rigidity of the system.
 - seem to equate exhaustion with being challenged and learning a lot.



- believe that this is how college will be— so this type of instruction is fine.
-

“I’m not sure you can really say how you would like to mold it (the course) to fit you because you are trying to mold yourself to fit what a college is going to do to you.”

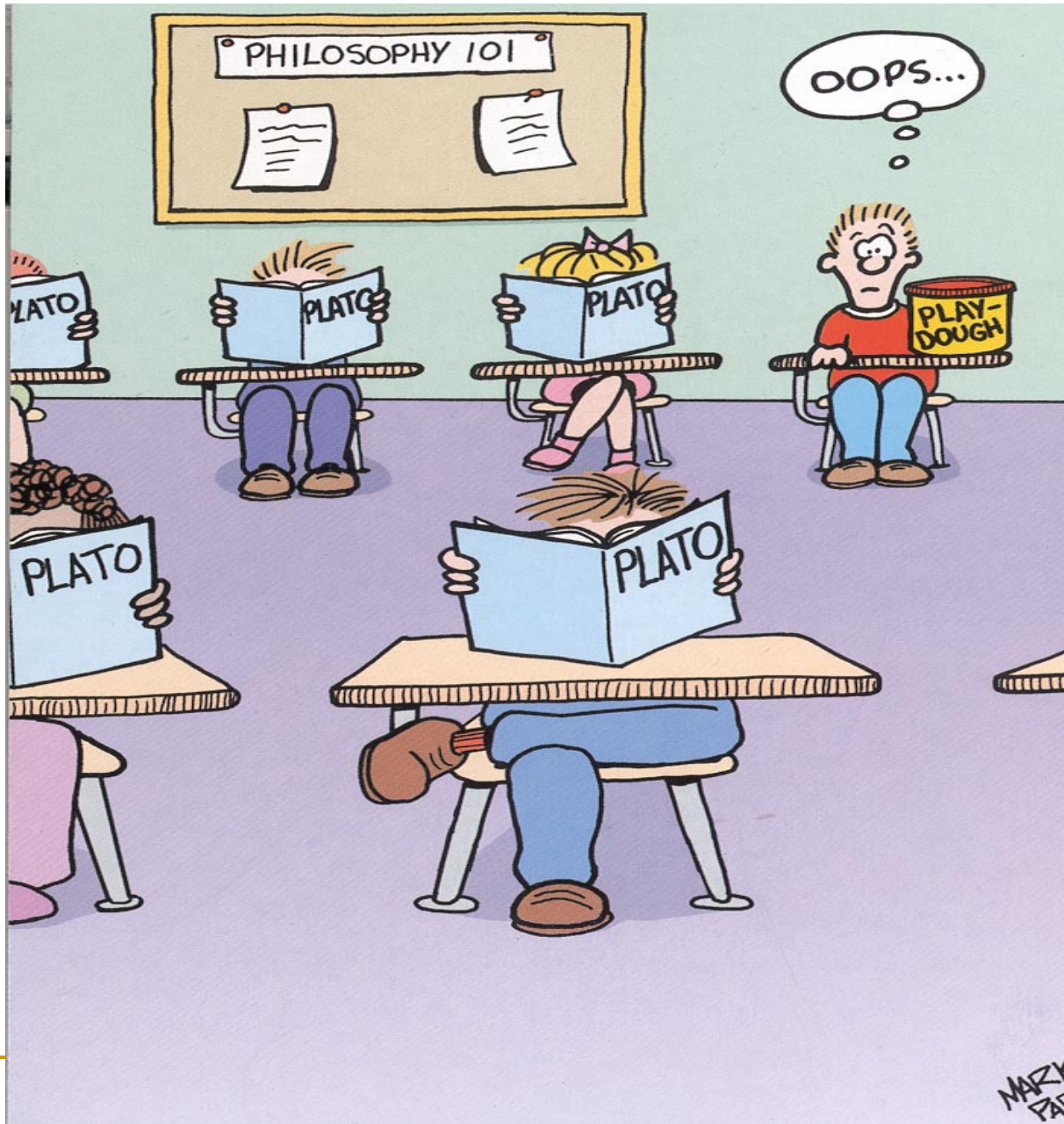


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- Students currently attending these classes seem to represent a self-selected group, largely fitting a student profile of long-time school success, with the expected attributes of self-motivation, drive to succeed, conformity to school expectations, and academic achievement.
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BUT...

What about
the students
who don't
make it in AP
and IB
classes?





Not all students find AP or IB a good fit

- ❑ students without mastery of requisite skills (good study habits, motivation, writing skills)
 - ❑ students who “learn differently”
 - ❑ students who question the system
 - ❑ students who don’t fit the “AP mold”
-

Lack of prerequisite skills

- “You have all these summer assignments to do. For English class, you have to read 2 books and do 10 note cards on them and pick out significant lines. We didn’t do that kind of stuff at my school, so I had no idea what I was talking about. I failed these note cards that I had no instruction on how to do. That’s like walking into traffic blindfolded. You just don’t know what you’re doing, and there’s no reason that you should have to do something that you’ve never had experience with or were exposed to.” (Student Interview, Marshall HS)

Students who learn differently

- “I realized that the program wasn’t for me. I have a way of learning and a way of studying that does not correlate well with the AP program... this isn’t a better education; this is busy work. What’s the point?” (Student Interview, Swingback HS)

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- “If you are intelligent in a way that is more creative energy than being able to sit down and accept that geometry is geometry and you have to know it even though you don’t plan to use it, then IB classes are probably not for you. If you question these things, then you’re not going to do as well. That was my problem. I wanted to know why.”

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- “ I felt like I was constricted to the one way they want everything done. They wanted you to write the papers like this, they wanted you to answer the essays like this. This is what you’re supposed to do on the project. I felt like I was in jail. And if I didn’t, of course, I would fail or get points taken off.”

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Largely homogeneous group...

“Yeah, I don’t like the attitudes of the people. You feel like they are intellectual Aryans. That’s one thing I don’t like about it. ...I’m black, which is, you know, not hard to see. I’m in these classes which are, what, ten percent black. In government we got into this discussion about the Ku Klux Klan, and they’re like, “Why do you think it’s so bad?”...

“...I feel like sometimes I’m all alone in some of the things I believe like that. Somebody says, “Well, you’re the only one that thinks that way.” And I’m like, “I’m the only one who’s black.” (Student Interview, Wallace HS)

Tentative Themes from Schools with Formal Support Mechanisms in Place

- Importance of peer group
 - Importance of faculty that is united and supportive of each other and goal of increasing participation of under-served populations
 - Teachers able to adjust goals for students (building skills, not test performance) and provide scaffolding for success
 - Supportive adults
 - Importance of learning the unspokens— what courses you have to take, what is expected, which teachers to take and who to avoid, learning to ask for help
-

In sum...

- AP and IB classes are perceived by many students and teachers as providing high-level challenge appropriate for gifted learners.
 - AP and IB classes are generally the most challenging classes offered in high schools.
 - However, the rigidity of the programs do not allow teachers to feel comfortable accommodating a broad range of learners.
 - Students are expected to come to AP and IB courses with the skills/attitudes necessary for success in the programs– not to develop them once they're in.
 - Unique students meet with resistance and cognitive dissonance.
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Preliminary Recommendations

- Broaden recruiting practices early, targeting typically underserved populations
 - Instruction within and beyond AP classes must become more responsive to a variety of student needs and backgrounds
 - Develop, through teacher training, greater understanding of diverse manifestations of high potential
-

Preliminary Recommendations, cont'd

- Understand that AP courses were originally designed for a specific population of students not reflective of everyone who is taking them today
 - As a result, we need to teach AP courses with the needs of the students in our classrooms in mind
 - Recognize that “modifying” does not equal “dumbing down”
-

Preliminary Recommendations, cont'd

- Reexamine *purpose* of AP courses— which is more important: receiving college credit, or experiencing genuine, appropriate challenge?
 - Build a more balanced and diverse program for gifted secondary students that extends beyond AP and offers a broad array of services
-