

# Increasing Access to AP<sup>®</sup> for Traditionally Underserved Students

## Spotlight on Success: Student Supports

The College Board applauds schools for increasing access to Advanced Placement Program<sup>®</sup> (AP<sup>®</sup>) courses among traditionally underserved students. **Spotlight on Success** highlights the strategies schools across the country use to help more students succeed in rigorous course work and develop the content knowledge and critical thinking skills they will need in college.

**Cesar E. Chavez High School** opened its doors in 2003 in the quiet town of Delano, Calif. The first school year presented challenges to staff members, who took on new leadership roles with little or no training, and to the student body, which consisted only of ninth- and 10th-grade students. Many of these new students had a closed mind-set toward homework and academics that prevented them from achieving the school's mission of **fostering maximum academic achievement**. Despite being a new school, Cesar E. Chavez, with close to a 90 percent Latino population, has seen a steady, dramatic increase in the number of students receiving AP Exam scores of 3 or higher. The school's administration credits its student supports with giving students the tools they need to succeed in their college-level courses.

## Student Supports Help Prepare Students for Rigors of AP

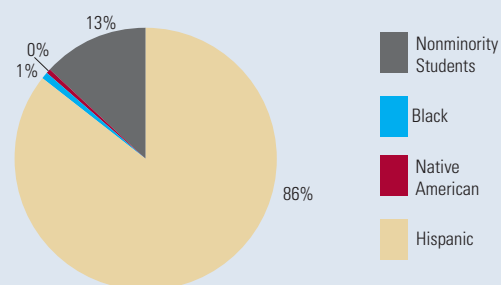
Cesar E. Chavez has set up student supports to sustain students as they encounter rigorous course work, such as that found in their AP classes, for the first time.

### Tutorials and After-School Hours

The school developed **mandatory after-school academic tutorials**, which are led and delivered by credentialed teachers teaching in their discipline. To combat scheduling conflicts, all after-school clubs, activities and sports begin

### Cesar E. Chavez High School (Delano, Calif.)

Demographics (as of 3/10)



- ▶ Grades 9–12
- ▶ 1,600 students
- ▶ Graduation rate: 89 percent
- ▶ Enrollment by lottery
- ▶ AP courses offered: 13

Source: <http://usnews.com/listings/high-schools/california/cesarechavezhighschool>

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after the tutorials finish. While the mandatory after-school academic tutorials are available to provide academic support for all students, the school recognizes that AP students require specialized, targeted support. With that in mind, AP teachers offer after-school tutorials to their AP students three times a week, including access to supervised computer labs. In addition, many AP teachers offer Saturday hours to accommodate busy student schedules. Cesar E. Chavez teachers acknowledge that often students feel more comfortable asking questions in small peer groups and, for this reason, formal peer tutoring is also available.

## Developing Writing Skills

Cesar E. Chavez also places a high priority on supporting AP students in developing superior writing skills. The school has invested in a Web-based tool that supports original writing in a digital age. It helps AP students focus on techniques for paraphrasing, summarizing, citing and quoting. It also offers AP students the ability to learn from each other by completing peer reviews and to become more engaged in course material that reinforces core course material. Students at Cesar E. Chavez benefit from receiving teacher and peer feedback on their written work before the work is actually due.

“If you give a student enough time to absorb and assimilate the essentials, that student will be more likely to master those concepts.”

— **Saul Gonzalez**  
Principal, Cesar E. Chavez High School

## Safety First

Surprise security checks are a unique form of student support, but students here are not surprised to see a team of two external security guards enter a classroom with a trained Labrador retriever and perform random checks. The school believes that, on a controlled campus, students are free to focus on work and can excel in academics and leave outside influences outside.

**“Safety is also a focus of the administration and teachers because it only furthers the chance that these students can better focus on learning”**

— **Lance Balla, College Board–endorsed consultant**

“The most important outcome is that the students feel empowered and continue their path to college. I am certain about one thing: The students are taking good, solid, beautiful experiences with them.”

— **Aurora Delgadillo**  
Foreign Language Department Chair/Teacher  
Cesar E. Chavez High School

## Achieving Equity

New schools with a large majority of traditionally underserved students can sometimes encounter challenges in ensuring students are aware of what level of work is required to succeed in rigorous courses. Successfully incorporating student supports like Cesar E. Chavez High School did can help schools make sure students don't slip through the cracks. Recognizing that AP students might need specialized support helps ensure that any student who is willing and academically prepared to participate in AP has an opportunity to succeed.

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## Spotlight on Success: Building a Pipeline to Rigor

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**Cypress Bay High School** is nestled in the suburbs of sunny Broward County in southern Florida. When walking into Cypress Bay, one is welcomed with a view of an array of trophies, earned for both athletics and academic excellence. **Cypress Bay High School has the distinction of having the largest number of Latino students from the class of 2009 scoring a 3 or higher in seven different AP subjects.**

## A Pipeline to AP Success

Cypress Bay High School opened its doors eight years ago with the same goal it has today — supporting and creating a pathway to AP success from the very start of high school. Students discuss AP in terms of *when* they will take AP courses, not *if* they will take them.

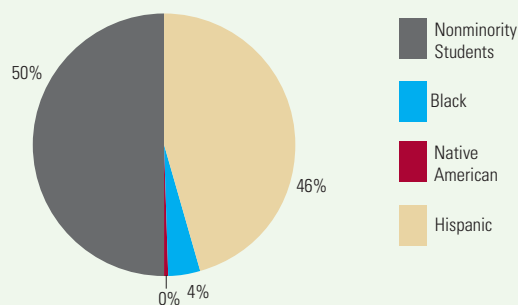
The school's administrators think that it is imperative to:

- ▶ Hire educators who have high expectations of Cypress Bay's diverse student body;
- ▶ Have a strong curriculum in the ninth and 10th grades leading to AP courses;
- ▶ Develop strong writing skills in all courses, for all students; and
- ▶ To offer as much professional development as possible to all teachers.

"Just being exposed to AP course work is not enough for us. I want students to trust that they can pass

### Cypress Bay High School (Weston, Fla.)

Demographics (as of 3/10)



- ▶ **Grades 9–12**
- ▶ **Graduation rate: 94.5 percent (2009)**
- ▶ **Total Enrollment: 3982**
- ▶ **AP courses offered: 28**

Source: <http://cypressbayhigh.com/Academic-Profile.pdf>

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the exams,” says Marianela Estripeaut, curriculum specialist at Cypress Bay. Most honors courses are developed with the intent of exposing students to rigor and acclimating students early in their high school career to skills that are stressed in AP. Cypress Bay mandates that all students enrolled in AP courses take the AP Exam in May. Teachers offer special class sessions as well as after-school and Saturday tutorials to support students. Most AP classes also offer Saturday practice tests leading up to the exams.

## Assessing Content Knowledge

At Cypress Bay, teachers use common assessments at the end of each teaching unit, in both AP courses and non-AP courses, usually made up of two to three questions. These questions are given to students during class and then the results are tabulated. The results of these assessments are not used as an evaluative measure for teacher job performance, but are instead for teachers to use within their subject curriculum teams to evaluate how well their students are mastering the content. The results also show teachers what changes need to be made throughout the year to ensure that the students will be as prepared as possible for future rigorous course work. Examples of questions the teams might discuss are:

- ▶ What is the hardest topic that is coming up this quarter? What are the best practices to facilitate the teaching of this topic?
- ▶ What new motivational techniques can your group think of in order to motivate the students?
- ▶ Was there an assessment that did not go well? Any ideas why?

## Improving Student Achievement Through Professional Learning Communities

Another way in which Cypress Bay High School manages to maintain focus on developing a pathway to success is by offering its teachers an opportunity to be involved in professional learning communities (PLCs). The school defines a PLC as a small group of educators with common interests and a common goal of improving student achievement through a collaborative process where data are analyzed, problems are detected, and possible solutions are implemented and revisited throughout a period of time. The PLCs offer these educators time to reflect on the process and practice of teaching. The communities also afford them a time and a place to discuss best practices or analyze why something did not work in the classroom.

AP teachers interested in joining similar communities can join an electronic discussion group in their subject areas on AP Central® to allow them to exchange ideas, insights and practices with fellow teachers and educators across the nation. To register for an AP electronic discussion group, please visit: <http://apcentral.collegeboard.com>.

## Achieving Equity

At Cypress Bay High School, the goal every year is to create the perfect curriculum pathway that will lead and prepare more students to take AP course work and exams because, at Cypress Bay, the motto is **“It’s when you take AP, not if!”**

Cypress Bay’s **pipeline to rigor** has helped the school lead the nation in assisting Latino students to succeed in particular AP subjects. This increased access to, and success in, AP is especially crucial because AP is a powerful tool in preparing traditionally underserved students to succeed in college.

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## Spotlight on Success: School Culture

The College Board applauds schools for increasing access to Advanced Placement Program<sup>®</sup> (AP<sup>®</sup>) courses among traditionally underserved students. **Spotlight on Success** highlights the strategies schools across the country use to help more students succeed in rigorous course work and develop the content knowledge and critical thinking skills they will need in college.

**City on a Hill** is an urban charter school in Massachusetts that opened its doors in 1995. Two years into the school's history, City on a Hill decided to review its mission statement. The faculty and staff discovered that their mission was not thorough enough and did not outline what students and teachers needed to do to be part of a truly successful public charter school. They created a comprehensive new vision committed to nurturing a student's curiosity and sense of rights and responsibilities as an American citizen. The new vision focuses on the school becoming a learning institution with an established system in place for collecting and utilizing feedback and fulfilling its civic mission by hiring faculty that reflect Boston's diversity.

City on a Hill has already seen an impressive increase in AP participation, even though the school only began its AP program five years ago. With the school's very small student population made up of close to 70 percent low-income students and almost all traditionally underserved students, the school's administration believes its emphasis on developing a culture of success is the driver for this increase.

## A College-Going Culture

Erica Brown, principal and executive director, believes that the biggest driver of City on a Hill's success has been school culture. A 14-year veteran principal, **Brown strongly recommends that all new principals should paint the**

### City on a Hill

(Roxbury, Mass.)

#### School Demographics (as of 3/10)

Race	% of School
African American	78.0
Asian	0.7
Hispanic	19.0
White	2.0

Other Profile Information	% of School
First Language not English	23.0
Limited English Proficiency	0.7
Low-Income	67.5
Special Education	13.1
Free Lunch	52.9
Reduced-Price Lunch	14.6

- ▶ **Grades 9–12**
- ▶ **Charter school**
- ▶ **282 students**
- ▶ **Graduation rate: 76.3 percent**
- ▶ **Enrollment by lottery**
- ▶ **AP courses offered: 4**

Source: [http://www.cityonahill.org/our\\_students.php](http://www.cityonahill.org/our_students.php)

# Increasing Access to AP for Traditionally Underserved Students

**word COLLEGE in 10-foot letters in the busiest, most populated site in the school** as a constant reminder of the common goal to all in the school.

## Curriculum and Instruction

In addition to the ever-present COLLEGE sign as a reminder to students, the administration tackled curriculum, instruction and behavioral changes in the school to further create a culture of success.

Brown selected one school administrator to oversee the change process. To begin, City on a Hill educators reviewed AP Exams in specific subjects. They then assessed what content and skills from these exams were missing in the school's current curricula in those subjects. The educators continued this mapping exercise by then assessing how teachers were implementing these curricula through instruction in their classrooms, and made changes accordingly. During this process, the educators enjoyed a healthy discussion on what students today need to be successful in college, and the two main skills agreed on were **writing and higher-order thinking**. As a result of their analysis, the school's administration formalized lesson plans and evaluations. In addition, teachers now use a configured standard whiteboard with the class agenda, objectives of the day and homework listed on the board to maximize learning time in the class. Teachers also devote time to specifically teach study skills, another area they deem vital for college success.

## One-on-One Attention

Full-time teachers act as advisers and meet with students twice a day, every day. These advisers communicate with the parents/guardians at least once a month, with a goal of having at least one face-to-face meeting a year to discuss the student's academic progress. (The advisers have a 98 percent success rate in this area.) School counselors meet with all students and offer seniors an "Introduction to College" course. In addition, all students have one-on-one tutoring with a faculty member five days a week during the school year. Upperclassmen also offer peer-to-peer tutoring to ninth- and 10th-grade students.

## Behavioral Changes

Lastly — but, staff feel, most importantly — City on a Hill implemented schoolwide behavioral changes to

promote a school culture that is more conducive to learning and more focused on removing the distractions to learning. Faculty and staff focused on building the behavioral habits that lead to academic success, that were transparent to students and families, and that were consistently able to be implemented by all staff.

Some behavioral changes City on a Hill implemented were:

- ▶ Making the school uniform more formal;
- ▶ Instituting a merit–demerit system to make behavioral interventions consistent; and
- ▶ Building a consistent system of classroom organization for all students.

## Did you know?

For the past 11 years, **100 percent** of City on a Hill graduates have been accepted to college.

## A Road Map for Creating a Culture of Success

Small schools sometimes struggle with raising academic expectations, but City on a Hill's focus on creating a college-going culture clearly shows students that the school truly values academic excellence. Schools interested in raising expectations and increasing access to AP, like City on a Hill, can employ similar strategies, such as:

- ▶ Fostering an environment of academic rigor with high expectations for all
- ▶ Encouraging an all-encompassing commitment to learning
- ▶ Ensuring challenging and engaging teaching and learning
- ▶ Maintaining knowledgeable and caring relationships with students



# Increasing Access to AP<sup>®</sup> for Traditionally Underserved Students

## Spotlight on Success: Aligning Curricula

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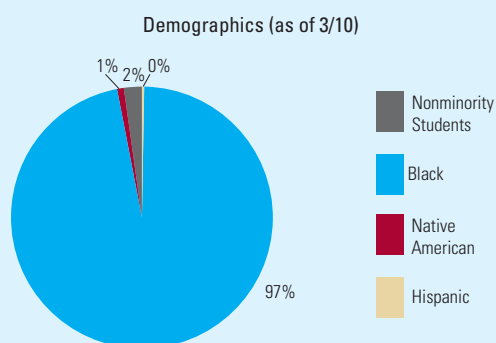
**Detroit, Mich.**, is a city filled with a diversity of people, industry and history that continues to bring opportunities as well as challenges to its residents and the schools that strive to meet the needs of this diverse community. One of Detroit's magnet schools, Renaissance High School, opened its doors over 31 years ago and has achieved a remarkable level of success in educating and preparing its students for college. **Renaissance High School has the distinction of being the public school with the largest number of African American students from the class of 2009 scoring a 3 or higher in AP English Literature in the nation.**

Because Renaissance is a magnet school, students interested in attending must take an admission test in order to be admitted. Principal Gail Russell-Jones has spent most of her career at the school and has grown with it, having arrived one year after Renaissance opened. Russell-Jones credits the school's success on hard work. **"There is no magic pill, just hard work and continued learning for all,"** she says.

## Curriculum Alignment

Renaissance's philosophy is simple — create an aligned curriculum that produces a pipeline to AP. By clearly identifying students' end goal as success in AP, the school has been able to align its curriculum with the students' learning objectives and create a pathway to this

### Renaissance High School (Detroit, Mich.)



- ▶ Grades 9–12
- ▶ 1,035 students
- ▶ Graduation rate: 94.3 percent (2006)
- ▶ AP courses offered: 9

Source: <http://www.usnews.com/listings/high-schools/michigan/renaissancehighschool>

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goal. Renaissance uses a variety of strategies to align its curriculum, some of which are outlined below.

## Rigorous Honors Classes

Honors classes are treated as preparation for AP course work. The school's goal is to create such rigorous honors classes that if these students were to take the equivalent AP Exam, they should hope to score a 2 or higher on it.

## Experienced Teachers Instructing Ninth-Grade Students

Another strategy employed by Renaissance to align curricula is asking 11th- and 12th-grade teachers to volunteer to teach ninth-grade classes. Renaissance's administrators believe that although students are tested prior to enrollment, it is difficult to ascertain or truly measure students' ability until they arrive at the school. Experienced teachers, who are aware of what knowledge and skills students will need at the end of their high school experience, are able to orient students from the very beginning. "Students need strong teachers on both ends," declares Russell-Jones.

## Focusing on AP English First

Renaissance's strategic plan is presently focused on its English courses. The 10th grade focuses on English Literature and the 11th grade focuses on English Language, with the intent that seniors will be ultimately prepared for a rigorous 12th-grade AP English experience. For this reason, AP English Literature and AP English Language are the fastest-growing classes at the school.

## AP Resources for Aligning the Curriculum

The AP Program offers a variety of resources to help schools align curricula. To find out more, please explore the following websites:

- ▶ **College Board Standards for College Success™** at <http://professionals.collegeboard.com/k-12standards>. These standards define the knowledge and skills students need to develop and outline a clear pathway to AP and college readiness.
- ▶ **Institutes & Workshops** at **apcentral.collegeboard.com**. The College Board offers a variety of Pre-AP®, vertical teaming and professional development opportunities to help teachers align the curriculum.

## Achieving Equity

Renaissance High School has seen success in increasing access to, and success in, AP through the implementation of a number of strategies. As Renaissance enters a new decade, it will continue to:

- ▶ Systematically use data to drive decisions;
- ▶ Develop systems and structures to support students and their teachers in rigorous classes; and
- ▶ Align and strengthen the math curriculum once AP English Literature and AP English Language strategies are stabilized.

The school's commitment to **aligning curricula to produce a pipeline to AP** has helped it develop an exemplary AP program in English Literature, and we will no doubt see Renaissance make similar strides in other subjects in the future.



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## Spotlight on Success: Data-Driven Decisions

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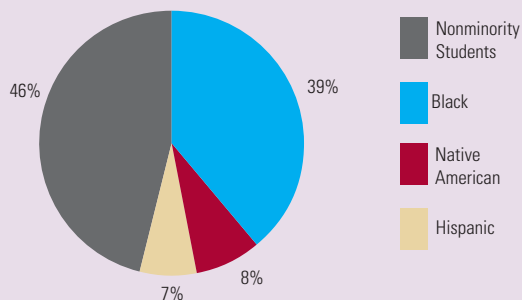
**Tulsa, Okla.**, ranked by *Forbes* magazine as one of the most livable cities in the United States, is the home of Booker T. Washington High School, which opened its doors in 1913 to serve the African American community in that area. Today, Booker T. Washington High School prides itself on its ability to both promote excellence and appreciate the racial and religious diversity within its walls. In 2009, the school received the coveted distinction of being a Blue Ribbon School recognized by the United States government for being academically superior. **In addition, Booker T. Washington has seen a significant number of its American Indian students achieving a score of 3 or higher on AP Exams.**

## Using Student Data to Provide Targeted Support

Rachel Stacy, Booker T. Washington High School's assistant principal in charge of curriculum, instruction and admission, is also the school's AP Coordinator. Stacy attributes Booker T. Washington High School's success to the school's use of student data to drive student success. Disaggregating data, obtained and reviewed monthly, helps Booker T. Washington High School pinpoint exactly where underserved students need more support, recognizing that student trends differ from year to year. Stacy warns that every class is different and that exceptional efforts need to be made to understand the strengths and weakness of all incoming classes. She believes this is especially important when working in such diverse classrooms. The school collects sequential data from the Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test and SAT<sup>®</sup> results. Similarly, the school administers the PSAT/NMSQT<sup>®</sup> to all students in the 10th grade, and then uses AP Potential<sup>™</sup> to identify those students likely to succeed on AP Exams based on their scores. For more information about using

### Booker T. Washington High School (Tulsa, Okla.)

Demographics (as of 3/10)



- ▶ Grades 9–12
- ▶ Magnet school
- ▶ 1,268 students
- ▶ Graduation rate: 100 percent (2008)
- ▶ AP courses offered: 31

Source: [http://www.tulsaschools.org/profiles/washington\\_HS.pdf](http://www.tulsaschools.org/profiles/washington_HS.pdf)

# Increasing Access to AP for Traditionally Underserved Students

AP Potential to increase access to AP and to ensure that no student who has the chance of succeeding in AP is overlooked, please visit [appotential.collegeboard.com](http://appotential.collegeboard.com).

## Data as a Channel to Develop Relationships

This data-collecting process and analysis is shared with all new incoming teachers in a one-on-one orientation. During this orientation, new teachers learn about the diverse population of students that attend Booker T. Washington High School and about strategies and activities for working in these classrooms. One of these strategies is having students fill out note cards with information about themselves, such as their learning styles, favorite things and after-school interests. They return these note cards to the teacher to help develop the teacher–student relationship. Laying the foundation for these relationships early on enables students to feel more comfortable to make mistakes that they can learn from. The teachers and administrators at Booker T. Washington like to think of their institution as not just a high school, but a life school — a place where desire plus discipline plus a can-do attitude gets students where they want to go.

## AP Exam Data Help Schools Analyze Performance

Another way to recognize student achievements and identify weaknesses is through the use of **AP Exam** data. Each July, schools receive a number of AP reports that help teachers and administrators at Booker T. Washington **analyze their students' performance and the effectiveness of their courses**.

Schools receive:

- ▶ An AP score report for each student;
- ▶ A cumulative roster of all students; and
- ▶ Rosters of all students by exam.

Booker T. Washington also uses, as do all schools with AP programs, the *AP Instructional Planning Report* that is sent to all teachers. This report helps AP teachers understand how their students did on AP Exams and identify areas in their AP courses that might need more concentration. Administrators then use the data on all these reports to **chart overall progress toward school and district goals**. For more information about AP score reports, please visit Score Reporting at [www.collegeboard.com/onlineapscores](http://www.collegeboard.com/onlineapscores).

## Using Data to Identify Opportunities to Increase Skills

Another way Booker T. Washington uses data is to identify skills that need further development to better prepare students for success in rigorous classes. The high school has 22 feeder middle schools, and it accepts students with a 2.5 GPA or higher and a minimum 35th percentile in reading and math. By collecting data about these incoming freshmen through the test results and reports outlined above, the school has discovered some overarching commonalities in these students, such as their lack of a common academic vocabulary, consistent independent study habits or note-taking strategies. Faculty periodically review these trends and develop strategies to tackle them. One such strategy was the creation of a freshman notebook that includes important information about skills for success in a student's first year of high school. This resource is distributed at the Freshman Orientation/ Making the Best of High School Count event, which is planned by a committee of parents, community members and school faculty. In the spring of their freshman year, students receive an insert with information about their upcoming sophomore year.

## Expanding Access and Seeing Results

**In the 2008-09 school year, Booker T. Washington increased the number of students achieving a score of 3 or higher on AP Exams by 15.8 percent over the previous year.** The school has an open access policy, and informational meetings are offered to students and parents about the importance of the PSAT/NMSQT, SAT and AP courses. In addition, the school does not deny any student access to AP. Students who have the skills, desire and drive are welcome to take AP classes. Students and parents are asked to sign a contract that acknowledges what will be expected of them in the AP class of their choice.

As Booker T. Washington continues to use data to make informed curricular and school decisions, its faculty anticipates seeing more and more students enrolling in AP courses and scoring a 3 or higher on their AP Exams.