



NEGP MONTHLY

A monthly in-depth look at states and communities and their efforts to reach the National Education Goals
Published by the NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS PANEL

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ADVANCING AP

Increasing the number of students who take Advanced Placement (AP) courses is a goal shared by many educators, public officials and The College Board, the organization that administers the AP program. State and federal programs and a College Board initiative to reduce or eliminate the AP exam fees has allowed more economically disadvantaged students to enroll in the courses and take the test.

State officials from New York, Virginia and Connecticut, states that in 1999 were among the nation's top-performing states and increased the number of students earning a score of 3 or above on AP exams, also report that the standards movement has helped students earn high marks on AP tests.

— OVERVIEW —

At the dawn of a new century, the Advanced Placement (AP) Program, run by the College Board, continues to shine as a model for a rigorous high school curriculum. Established in 1955, AP courses challenge high school students with college-level academic work in 32 areas, with exams in 19 disciplines. AP courses currently are offered in nearly 12,000 high schools in every state in the U.S. and every province and territory in Canada and 63 other countries. Nearly 3,000 universities throughout the world grant credit, advanced placement, or both to students who have performed satisfactorily on AP Exams.

Recognizing the high quality and rigor of AP coursework, the National Education Goals Panel includes AP data in its annual *Goals Report* to the nation because success in AP courses reflects student mastery of challenging subject matter and results are comparable across states.

Success on AP is therefore one Goals Panel indicator of Goal 3: Student Achievement and Citizenship . The indicator probes whether states have increased the number of AP



exams receiving a grade of 3 or higher (per 1,000 11th and 12th graders). While many states have improved, several have distinguished themselves in this area, including New York, Connecticut and Virginia. This Monthly features the efforts undertaken by these states to increase the number of students taking the AP exam and receiving a grade of 3 or higher.

Wade Curry, director of the College Board's AP Program, notes the record growth in the number of students who enrolled in AP courses and who took AP Exams during the 1997-1998 school year. Nationwide, students took nearly 100,000 more exams in 1997-1998 than during the previous academic year. He attributes this unprecedented increase to high school reform efforts that mandated higher standards and held schools and students accountable to them. Officials in the states featured in this Monthly concur with Curry – the call for higher standards had a positive impact on the number of students availing themselves of AP courses and exams and scoring well on the tests.

Universal Access to AP

College Board President Gaston Caperton, responding to a challenge issued by U.S. Education Secretary Richard Riley, has toured the country to discover better ways to foster educational equity for the AP program. "By extending AP to many more inner city and rural schools, we can raise the quality of instruction and levels of achievement for students who have been historically underserved," he said. "This is an equity issue," he declared. "We can't claim to have educational equity in this country, until we can say that youngsters from inner city districts and far-flung rural communities have equal access to educational excellence."

His "Learning Tour" took Caperton to Dallas, Boston, New York City, Washington D.C., San Jose, Los Angeles and Miami. Throughout his tour, Caperton announced the College Board national plan that would contribute to preparing and supporting by the year 2010:

- 180,000 AP teachers
- 23,000 AP high schools
- 2,000,000 AP students annually

Under Caperton's plan, the College Board will create extensive online teacher professional development courses and double the number of AP teacher workshops and institutes before the year 2010. The College Board also will develop more integrated Pre-AP programs, beginning in sixth grade, to prepare students for AP. "Adding more AP courses to historically low-achieving high schools will be meaningless unless we make major improvements in the quality of pre-AP preparation in middle school," he explained.

Caperton also outlined a plan for increasing the number of schools offering AP. The College Board will actively support an increase in state and federal funding for AP. It will expand administrator workshops for high-growth areas such as California, Texas and Florida. It also will create a Web-based program for all schools that introduce AP to assist schools in determining their current capabilities and future needs for offering a strong AP program in their schools.

Money Matters

Typical of many programs designed to promote equity issues, financial interests loom large as



The National Education Goals Panel

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a challenge to ensuring access by all students. The fees for taking AP exams are stiff – about \$80.00 per exam. Both the College Board and the U.S. Congress have addressed financial considerations in a concerted effort to expand access to AP coursework and exams. Since fiscal year 1998, Congress has provided funding to waive part or all of the cost of taking AP exams for low-income students through the “Advanced Placement Incentive Program.” The College Board applauds Congressional efforts to aid in fee assistance for several reasons, including:

- In both 1997 and 1998, over half of the fee-reduced students scored 3.0 or better (out of a possible 5.0) on the AP exams, which is high enough to earn college credit at many colleges and universities.
- Federal support has a major impact at the state level. As a result of the \$3 million appropriated to the 32 states that applied for assistance in fiscal year 1998, 23 states were able to offer AP exams to low-income students free-of-charge in May 1999. The other nine states offered exams at drastically reduced rates.
- The AP program is growing at a rate of 10% to 15% each year among low-income students.

The College Board stresses that fee reductions result in greater participation. For example, the College Board cites the Texas Incentive Program (TIP), created in 1994, at a time when the state administered only about 34,000 AP exams. Over the next four years, the number of AP exams given in Texas skyrocketed to more than 74,500 – a 120 percent increase. Low-income students in Texas were able to take AP exams free-of-charge starting last year due to the combined efforts of the state’s TIP program and a \$300,000 grant from the AP Incentive Program in fiscal year 1998.

The College Board also has its own fee reduction policy for low-income students. Between 1987 and 1998, the College Board increased the amount of money it spends on fee reductions for low income students by more than 500 percent (for a total of \$1.6 million in 1998). Over that same time period, the number of low-income students using the fee reduction increased by more than 300 percent.

Other College Board efforts designed to increase participation in the AP program were outlined by Caperton during his “Learning Tour.” They include:

- expanding administrator workshops for high-growth areas such as California, Texas and Florida.
- creating a Web-based program for all schools that introduces AP to assist schools in determining their current capabilities and future needs for offering a



- strong AP program in their schools
- joining forces with colleges of arts and sciences and colleges of education to train high quality AP teachers
- developing programs to hire retired teachers as master teachers and to recruit AP teachers from non-traditional sources such as corporations and research laboratories

This Monthly examines how Connecticut, Virginia and New York have worked to increase the number of AP exams receiving a grade of 3 or higher.

New York

New York is both a top performing and one of the most-improved states for increasing the number of AP exams receiving a grade of 3 or higher. In 1991, per 1,000 11th and 12th graders, 97 exams received a grade of 3 or higher. By 1999, that figure jumped to 155.

Richard Lynn, co-coordinator for curriculum and instruction with the New York Department of Education, pointed to two events that led to New York's high performance on this indicator: a more rigorous curriculum and an insistence that all students learn at high levels.

In the mid-1980s, New York's Regent's Action Plan took effect, which led to students taking more math than in the past and a mandatory "accelerated" curriculum in grade 8 in two areas, including math. Lynn explained that by "making sure that every school provided for high-achieving students, [more students were] permitted the opportunity to take AP courses and exams."

The emergence in the early 1990s of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) standards and New York's own standards better prepared students to succeed in AP courses. The emphasis on rigorous standards also encouraged many students to enroll in AP courses and do well in those courses.

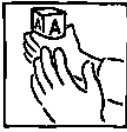
"There was a big push in the mid-1990s to put all youngsters in the Regent's program, which is equivalent to AP-level classes," said Lynn. By the late 1990s, students were required to pass the Regent's exam, not a competency test, to receive a diploma. "People saw this coming in the early 1990s," said Lynn, "and they prepared by upgrading the instruction," which had a side effect of boosting AP scores.

"We've always had a reputation for having a good number of AP examinees," concluded Lynn.

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THE NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS



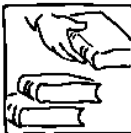
Goal 1: Ready to Learn



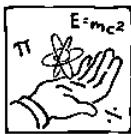
Goal 2: School Completion



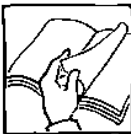
Goal 3: Student Achievement and Citizenship



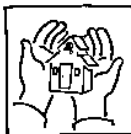
Goal 4: Teacher Education and Professional Development



Goal 5: Mathematics and Science



Goal 6: Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning



Goal 7: Safe, Disciplined and Alcohol- and Drug-free Schools



Goal 8: Parental Participation

Virginia

In 1999, 152 per 1,000 11th and 12th graders scored a grade of 3 or higher on AP exams in Virginia, well above the U.S. average of 97.

Several events took place in the early 1990s that may have led to increased student performance on AP exams, according to Dr. Patricia Wright, director, secondary instructional services, Virginia Department of Education. First, the state revised its standards of learning in four core areas – math, science, English and social science. “Students studying more rigorous curriculum would be more prepared for success in the AP exams,” said Wright.

The state Board of Education then established an accountability system for the state standards. Wright: “One can safely say that we have had a concerted emphasis on more rigorous standards across the board at all levels in all schools.” The Board of Education also requires that every school division offer at least two AP courses as part of its standards of accreditation.

Wright pointed out that the Board of Education has two high school diploma seals, one that recognizes students who take AP courses and complete advanced work with an A or B average, and one that recognizes students who complete at least one AP or college-level course.

For two years, Virginia also has participated in the U.S. Department of Education’s incentive grant program for AP that reduces the fee for low-income students.

“The bottom line,” said Wright, “is we have increased the state’s content standards across the board and accreditation standards that require schools to offer AP and recognize students who take AP courses.”

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Connecticut

Connecticut is both a top-performing state and one of the most-improved states for increasing the number of AP exams receiving a grade of 3 or higher. In 1991, per 1,000 11th and 12th graders, 83 AP exams received a grade of 3 or higher. By 1999, 148 exams in the state received a grade of 3 or higher

“Connecticut has had a strong AP program for some time now,” said Tom Murphy, special assistant to the commissioner, Connecticut State Department of Education. “We believe that there is an interest on the part of the students” to commit to the rigors of AP courses. He also pointed to the state’s high standards and level of instruction as helpful for high scores on the AP.

The past few years, however, mark a concerted effort on behalf of the Commissioner of Education, Theodore Sergi, to expand AP course offerings and increase the number of students enrolled in AP courses. Sergi sent a letter to superintendents across the state with district-by-district data on the number of AP course offerings and students taking the exams. According to Murphy, the purpose was not only to stir some competition among neighbors, but also to see “how we define ourselves as school districts.”

Sergi also sent several “Circular Letters” to superintendents of schools and high school principals regarding the AP program. One letter served to debunk myths surrounding the AP program. For example:

- “My teachers have not been trained as required by the Advanced Placement program,” writes Sergi. He continues: “The Advanced Placement program does NOT require specific training or approval of teachers. To teach an AP course, a teacher must be willing and believe that students can achieve at high academic levels. If a teacher wishes to be better prepared, there are a number of programs that he or she can take during the summer. These include programs at Connecticut State University, Taft School, Fitchburg State College and St. Johnsbury Academy. There are also many Connecticut AP teachers ready to help others who are interested in teaching AP courses.”
- “AP courses are for a small, elite group of students.” Sergi explains: “I disagree – and I support open enrollment in AP courses. Schools should add sections as demanded by the number of students interested. Why not let students select in or out of these challenging courses? Have you tracked the historical trend in student enrollment in AP courses, other college courses or honors classes?”

In the same letter, Sergi argues for supporting “any elementary and middle school activity that would build academic skills targeted at future enrollment in a high school AP course.” “Have you considered summer school programs for students who need encouragement or who need extra support to be prepared to succeed in AP courses?” he queries school leaders.

Murphy also noted Connecticut’s efforts to increase the number of students taking AP coursework and exams from the ranks of inner-city schools. In conjunction with the College Board, Connecticut officials have been working to provide teachers, particularly inner-city teachers, with AP prep courses at Central Connecticut State University (CSU) free-of-charge. A memo from Sergi to all superintendents and principals in Connecticut provides the list of AP preparation courses for high



RESOURCES

Advanced Placement Test Fee Reduction Program. U.S. Department of Education. Portals Building. Room 4500. Washington, D.C. 20202-6140. (202)260-2669.

The College Board. 45 Columbus Avenue. New York, N.Y. 10023-6992. (212)713-8000. (888)CALL-4-AP. www.collegeboard.org.

Education Commission of the States. 707 17th Street NW. Suite 2700. Denver, Colorado 80202-3427. (303)299-3600. www.ecs.org.

National Education Goals Panel. 1255 22nd Street NW. Suite 502. Washington, D.C. 20037. (202)724-0015. www.negp.gov.

Southern Regional Education Board. 592 Tenth Street NW. Atlanta, Georgia 30318-5790. (404)875-9211. www.sreb.org.

school faculty members offered during the summer at CSU, with mention that the cost is covered by the state. Sergi concludes: "If every high school in Connecticut offered just one new AP course next year for approximately 20 students, we would send a strong positive message to our students, staff and the community at large."

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Upcoming Goals Panel Events and Products

May 22, 2000:

The National Education Goals Panel will launch the first of a series of four public hearings throughout the nation. Through the hearings, the Goals Panel will identify best practices to ensure that all children achieve to higher standards. The hearings are part of the Goals Panel's *High Achieving Schools: The Promise, The Practice and the Results* initiative.

The first hearing will be held on May 22 in Los Angeles, hosted by Congressman Matthew Martinez (D-California) and Goals Panel Chairman Governor Tommy Thompson (R-Wisconsin). It will focus upon achieving high standards with minority and urban students. It will take place at the Alhambra City Council Chambers, 111 South First St., Alhambra.



What is the National Education Goals Panel?

The National Education Goals Panel is a unique bipartisan body of state and federal officials created in 1990 by President Bush and the nation's Governors to report state and national progress and urge education improvement efforts to reach a set of National Education Goals.

Who serves on the National Education Goals Panel and how are they chosen?

Eight governors, four state legislators, four members of the U.S. Congress, and two members appointed by the President serve on the Goals Panel. Members are appointed by the leadership of the National Governors' Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the U.S. Senate and House, and the President.

What does the Goals Panel do?

The Goals Panel has been charged to:

- Report state and national progress toward the National Education Goals.
- Work to establish a system of high academic standards and assessments.
- Identify promising and effective reform strategies.
- Recommend actions for state, federal and local governments to take.
- Build a nationwide, bipartisan consensus to achieve the Goals.

The annual Goals Report and other publications of the Panel are available without charge upon request from the Goals Panel or at its web site www.negp.gov. Publications requests can be made by mail, fax, or e-mail, or by Internet.

June 1, 2000

The second Goals Panel field hearing will be held in Burlington, Vermont, hosted by U.S. Senator Jim Jeffords (R-Vermont) and Goals Panel Chairman Governor Tommy Thompson (R-Wisconsin). It will focus upon teachers and teacher policies needed to achieve high student standards..

June 15, 2000

First meeting of the Goals Panel's *Measuring Success Task Force*. The new task force will advise the Goals Panel on a plan to increase the speed by which data needed by the Goals Panel are gathered and provided; and the content and format of its regular data progress reports over the next decade. The task force is chaired by former Maine Governor and NEGP chair John R. McKernan, Jr..