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college credit) are likely to have better college performance and higher four-year college graduation rates than are students who did not take an AP course (Hargrove, Godin, & Dodd, 2007). Research findings like this made us even more determined to expand AP enrollment until all college-bound students at Evanston Township High School have completed at least one AP course so that they are better prepared for college and career success.

9th

The board of education also approved restructuring the freshman year, linking AP skills in history, English, and biology to high expectations in a real and sustainable way. We stopped tracking 9th graders into honors and regular-level sections. Instead, we created diverse classrooms with high expectations for all students and adopted an earned honors credit model.

All students in these classes have a rigorous, honors-level curriculum. Throughout the semester, all students take a series of assessments aligned to AP skills, which account for 20 percent of their grade. To receive honors credits for the semester, students must earn 80 percent of the earned honors credit points on these assessments and earn a C or better in the course. Because the assessments are highly challenging, not all freshmen earn honors credit. But all freshmen have the chance to try.

The use of rubrics that communicate high standards provides students with clear expectations regarding honors-level work. Claude Steele (2010) asserts that this combination of high standards and constructive feedback reduces stereotype threat, enabling students to focus on meeting the standards instead of doubting their intellectual abilities.

We recognized that along with increased rigor, we needed to provide abundant supports. Therefore, we make academic support available throughout the school year. Our Academic Success Center is open before, during, and after school Monday through Friday. Students are able to receive help from their teachers Monday through Friday before school starts. Our AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) and STAE (Steps Toward Academic Excellence) programs also support many freshmen. In addition, Evanston Township offers an academic intervention team of trained professionals to identify and assist students who are struggling.

Freshman year restructuring helped create a growth mind-set (Dweck, 2006) because students were given opportunities to work toward earning honors credit throughout the semester. Rather than being labeled as honors students at the start of the course, our students in 9th grade history, English, and biology courses are in the process of becoming honors students through their own efforts, which mirrors our philosophy of treating all students as potential AP students.

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Early on, we met informally with diverse groups of students in the college and career center. When we engaged our students of color in casual conversations about their academic experiences, common themes emerged.

The students said that Evanston Township High School was not doing enough to inform students of color about advanced courses and how taking these courses would affect their college and career achievement. Once students of color enrolled in AP courses, they struggled to feel they belonged in an academic culture that appeared to favor white students. Many students spoke about the challenge of being the only student of color in their AP class.

One of our goals, therefore, was to put enough students of color in AP classes to ameliorate stereotype threat and signal that they belonged in that space. Although restructuring the freshman year was significant, we needed a champion for awareness, access, and success in advanced placement courses—someone to rally students, teachers, and parents. We needed an individual who could coach students and connect AP coursework with post-secondary success. In the end, we found a calculus teacher and a college counselor to serve in this capacity; together they helped mobilize students in developing several long-term awareness, access, and success initiatives to support current and prospective AP students.

Our first awareness initiative, the annual Pathways to AP forum, included a diverse panel of nine current AP students and sought to inform the community, 10th and 11th grade students, and their families about the importance of taking challenging courses, the benefits of successfully completing those courses, and the supports available to help students reach their goals. The forum has since expanded to include 7th–11th graders and a breakout question-and-answer session to address students' and families' common concerns, such as the appropriate number of AP courses to take and how to manage course expectations.

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Stemming from the success of the first forum, AP students who had appeared on the panel formed **teamASAP**

Students involved with teamASAP share their AP experiences with faculty, staff, and administrators in monthly meetings, as part of panels, and through fishbowl activities. One of teamASAP's black female seniors, Indyia, sees these activities as

a perfect breeding ground for trust. TeamASAP not only helps us, the students, but teachers as well because they get to hear our thoughts and improve based on our feedback.

Tanya, a Latina 12th grader, describes how teamASAP has supported her:

After having almost convinced myself to quit one of my AP classes due to mental exhaustion and feelings of inadequacy, I found myself supported and understood by my friends in teamASAP and decided to follow through with what I had signed up for.



With help from the Increasing Access and Success in AP Committee, teamASAP has created a series of student-centered events to prepare, support, and empower students for the successful completion of advanced placement courses, leading to increased opportunity in the future.

Awareness and success events are held on selected Saturdays throughout the year to help students feel more confident about deciding to enroll in AP courses. Attendees participate in icebreakers and team tasks, and teamASAP members facilitate small-group discussions about how the tasks relate to being successful in AP courses. Events are strategically scheduled so that students can attend one before and one after choosing their AP courses.

We have also enhanced day-to-day supports for students enrolled in AP classes. During structured morning, evening, and Saturday review sessions, study centers and classrooms are abuzz with AP

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start their college essays, thus reducing the stress they would feel if they were starting these tasks while diving into AP courses in the fall.



Today, we see the positive effects that high expectations, a sense of belonging, and a growth mind-set have on student achievement. Forty percent of black students and 62 percent of Latino and Latina students who walked across the stage at Evanston Township High School graduation last year had taken an advanced placement course.

Through deliberate action of the school board, restructuring of the curriculum, and mobilization of students, Evanston Township High School has transformed its AP program to one of expanded access and success. A student-driven network with a passion for creating a positive and encouraging environment for students of color in advanced curriculum has been central to achieving our goals. With increased rigor, we are serving our students in new and exciting ways to help ensure a successful future for all—no invitation needed.



Bowen, W. G., Chingos, M. M., & McPherson, M. S. (2009). Crossing the finishing line: Completing college at America's public