

Spokane Public Schools Spokane, Washington



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Our Reason for Tackling AP/IB Equity Work

As part of our strategic plan, we are committed to all students graduating from high school with the most rigorous high school transcript possible. Research is really clear that one of the biggest predictors of student success in post-secondary studies is the rigor and intensity of their high school experience. Advanced Placement is one of the areas where students can experience this rigor, so we established two goals: increase the percent of our graduating students who take an AP course and to simultaneously increase the passing rates in our AP courses. It is imperative that all students feel welcome in these college preparatory courses and are prepared for whatever post-secondary route of study they want to pursue.

The Most Inspiring Aspect of the Work

Seeing students in the courses, listening to their stories, and watching their confidence grow. Graduates would come back from college sharing how these courses prepared them for their studies. Students gained confidence they could take stretch courses and be successful. And they were able to access these courses in a safe environment with a lot of support. It is incredibly challenging to take college level courses and to understand the level of work that it takes to be successful. By accessing these courses in high school when they have instruction on a daily basis for an entire school year, it is a great introduction and sets them up for success in any post-secondary pursuit.

Who Benefits Most

The students benefited the most from our work with Equal Opportunity Schools. After completing the initial survey, schools got individualized student reports and clear goals on what they needed to do to increase equity in our AP courses. These reports allowed principals, counselors, and teachers to have conversations with students using their self-identified strengths and passions. Schools reported that the clear list of students and families to recruit coupled with specific actionable goals made all of the difference. They were able to see specific students who wanted to take challenging courses but who had not taken the risk to sign up for these courses. For staff, they were able to see that it took more than just advertising the courses. Prior to doing this work, some staff members felt that by providing the courses with open enrollment that we were already making them accessible. When they saw that some students needed more encouragement and support to actually move from considering them to enrolling in them, it made a huge difference.

Advice

First, set clear goals for schools to increase participation and passing rates; track this data on a regular basis and ask schools to provide work plans as part of their school improvement plans on how they will accomplish this. Second, spend time on the moral imperative and reason why this is a goal so everyone buys into the work. Third, create ongoing ways to put these practices into place. We have created ongoing data visualizations to track student course enrollment, completion, and passing rates so this work can continue every year. Fourth, provide financial and logistical support. Schools offering courses to students will need resources to recruit students and to help them be successful so some support will help not only in recruitment but in the ongoing work.

