

# Mesa Public Schools Mesa, Arizona



## Good Advice from Mesa Public Schools

Remove any gates or barriers you have to enrollment. We began that work prior to joining EOS and this was important as we began to talk to teachers about the types of students who "should be in AP". Without removing gates and barriers first, this work would have been so much harder. There are no more placement tests or writing samples used to determine suitability for AP in Mesa Public Schools. This was a huge mindset shift and we were glad we had done that work prior to the EOS efforts.

Start the survey process as early as you can. The earlier you have the information for the student information cards – the better your recruiting efforts can be. We register our students for the following school year very early in the spring, so we learned that we need to recruit them before the registration process starts so that they can select courses they want and that will challenge them.

Go big. We did this with six large (2700+) high schools at the same time. We had two schools completely close the enrollment gap and the other four significantly increased enrollment across the board in AP classes. This was a huge success. We did not hesitate to include all six schools because we wanted to create a culture where all high schools were talking about the same things and encouraging students to enroll in upper level coursework. This work is a District Strategic Initiative as determined by the superintendent and our Governing Board and is an ongoing expectation moving forward.



## Our Reason for Tackling AP/IB Equity Work

In the past several years, Mesa Public Schools has transitioned into a minority/majority district and yet our enrollment in AP/IB classes did not reflect this shift. This was identified as we began the work of identifying the achievement gap and beginning to actively talk about the gap and what we were going to do as a district to address it. Equal access to higher level course work quickly became a district priority. EOS has helped us achieve this important objective.

## The Most Inspiring Aspect of the Work

What inspires me most are the stories from the students. I meet with minority representative groups of students at each of the high schools each year and listen to their experiences. This past spring, I was inspired by the stories of surprise and pride that individual students experienced when a trusted adult talked to them about choosing AP/IB course work because they were "smart enough" to handle it. These students had not had that experience before and did not think they were capable. The work of EOS brought these students to our attention, we personally invited them to try AP/IB and they eagerly accepted.

## Who Benefits Most

We are beginning year two. The first year we had many unexpected beneficiaries of the work. As we worked to raise the awareness of enrollment in AP/IB classes, we captured many more students than previous years. So while our focus was increasing minority enrollment, we found that on some of our campuses, we needed to address increasing enrollment in general and then this year a more targeted focus on the underrepresented minority populations.

Those who benefited most were those students who would not have considered participating in AP/IB classes before. What we have learned is that not all of our students have the confidence or knowledge of the process to feel they are capable of success in the higher level courses. This is especially true of our minority students. One student shared, "I didn't think I was smart enough to be in an AP class, but I actually like it and I am doing well!"

