

Appendix A: Methodology

These findings are based on data from a randomly selected, nationally representative sample of 1,024 public high school teachers currently teaching at least one Advanced Placement (AP) course. The Farkas Duffett Research Group (FDR Group) conducted the survey, which was fielded from September 26 to October 31, 2008, for the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. The margin of error for the overall sample is plus or minus three percentage points; it's higher when comparing percentages across subgroups.

Before the survey was designed and administered, the FDR Group moderated four focus groups with AP teachers, one each in Frisco, Texas; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Riverton, Utah; and Rockville, Maryland. Participants were recruited to the FDR Group's specifications to ensure a proper demographic mix. The purpose of the focus groups was to gain a firsthand understanding of AP teachers' perceptions, to develop new hypotheses based on their input, and to use language and terms that teachers are comfortable with in the design of the survey questions. Quotes in this report are drawn directly from the focus group discussions.

Next, the FDR Group designed the survey instrument in two modes: paper, for respondents who chose to participate via U.S. mail; and Web-based, for respondents who preferred to reply online. In all, 884 responses were collected through the mail and 140 were obtained through the Internet. The researchers pretested the 60-question survey extensively with AP teachers before fielding it. The demographic and regional characteristics of the sample were matched to similar descriptive statistics in a 2005 College Board study of AP teachers.¹⁴ The FDR Group statistically weighted the survey data to align the regional distribution of teachers in the sample to that of the College Board data. The following sample weights were applied: Northeast, 2.69; Midwest, 0.74; South, 0.73; and West, 1.14.

The nonstratified random sample was drawn from a comprehensive database of names and school addresses of current AP public high school teachers. Market Data Retrieval, a subsidiary of Dun & Bradstreet, provided the sample; Robinson & Muenster Associates supplied the data collection and tabulation services. A total of 5,200 questionnaires, each accompanied by a cover letter and a postage-paid return envelope, were mailed. The cover letter described the research and included a URL for those who preferred to participate online. The first mailing went out on September 26, a reminder postcard followed one week later on October 6, and a second mailing was sent on October 14. Surveys received through October 31 were included in the results. The process netted 1,024 usable surveys, for a response rate of 20%.

14 Paek, Pamela L., Eva Ponte, Irv Sigel, Henry Braun, and Don Powers. 2005. *A Portrait of Advanced Placement Teachers' Practices*. Research Report No. 2005-7. New York: College Board.

Appendix B: Complete Survey Results

All numbers are reported as percentages; * = less than 0.05%. AP teachers were instructed to consider their experiences over the past five years when answering questions.

1. When it comes to how well the AP Program is working at your high school, what kind of overall rating would you give it?

- 25 Excellent
- 52 Good
- 19 Fair
- 3 Poor
- * Not sure

2. Has the number of students taking AP classes at your high school

- 21 Grown dramatically
- 44 Grown somewhat
- 24 Stayed about the same
- 8 Declined somewhat
- 2 Declined dramatically
- 1 Not sure

OF THOSE RESPONDING, NUMBER OF AP STUDENTS HAS GROWN Q2 (n = 659)

3. In what subject areas has the growth in AP students taken place?

- 17 Mostly in the hard sciences and mathematics
- 28 Mostly in subjects like psychology, English, or government
- 40 The growth is evenly distributed
- 15 Not sure

4. Has the class size of the AP classes you teach

- 41 Increased
- 16 Decreased
- 43 Stayed about the same
- * Not sure

5. When it comes to the AP subject that you primarily teach, which would you say is a better description?

- 20 Too many students want to take the class
- 29 Too few students want to take the class
- 48 The numbers are about right
- 2 Not sure

6. Has the quality of your AP students in terms of their aptitude and capacity to do the work

- 16 Improved
- 39 Declined
- 43 Stayed about the same
- 2 Not sure

7. When it comes to the level of difficulty and complexity of the material covered in the AP courses that you teach, has it become

- 27 More difficult
- 13 Less difficult
- 59 Stayed about the same
- 1 Not sure

8. Does your high school have a policy — whether formal or informal — of encouraging as many students as possible to take AP classes, or not?

- 65 Yes
- 27 No
- 8 Not sure

OF THOSE RESPONDING, HIGH SCHOOL HAS A POLICY OF ENCOURAGING AP Q8 ($n = 642$)

9. What do you think is the main reason your high school has a policy of encouraging as many students as possible to take AP classes?

- 12 To increase opportunity for historically neglected students
- 36 To improve the high school's reputation or standing
- 48 To better prepare students for college-level work
- 3 None of these/something else
- 2 Not sure

10. Other than expecting students to fulfill prerequisites, are your high school's AP classes

- 69 Generally open to any student who wants to take them
- Or
- 29 Are there limits on access, such as GPA or teacher approval?
- 2 Not sure

11. At your school, which do you think plays a bigger role in determining the size of the AP program?

- 25 The policies of the school system and administrators
- 60 The level of demand and abilities of the students
- 11 Neither/Something else
- 3 Not sure

12. Which comes closer to your own view?

- 38 The more students taking AP courses the better — even when they do poorly in the course, they benefit from the challenge and experience.
- Or
- 52 Only students who can handle the material should take AP courses — otherwise it's not fair to them, their classmates, their teachers, and the quality of the program.
- 9 Neither/Something else
- 2 Not sure

Across the nation, the AP program has been growing steadily in recent years. Here are some possible explanations for why this is happening. How convincing is each explanation to you? Please answer on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not convincing at all and 5 is extremely convincing. (Applies to Q13-19)

13. There are more students who want to be challenged at a higher academic level.

- 6 1 – Not convincing at all
- 20 2
- 41 3
- 27 4
- 5 5 – Extremely convincing
- 1 Not sure

14. There are more students who want their college applications to look better.

- * 1 – Not convincing at all
- 1 2
- 8 3
- 41 4
- 49 5 – Extremely convincing
- * Not sure

15. High schools are expanding their AP Program to improve their school's ranking and reputation in the community.

- 2 1 – Not convincing at all
- 5 2
- 17 3
- 43 4
- 33 5 – Extremely convincing
- 2 Not sure

16. The earlier grades are doing a better job of preparing students for the rigor of AP coursework.

- 19 1 – Not convincing at all
- 34 2
- 31 3
- 13 4
- 1 5 – Extremely convincing
- 2 Not sure

17. There are more students who want to save money or graduate faster from college by getting AP credits.

- 4 1 – Not convincing at all
- 12 2
- 24 3
- 37 4
- 21 5 – Extremely convincing
- 1 Not sure

18. Administrators are pushing more unqualified minority or low-income students into AP courses, just to make the classes look more diverse.

- 26 1 – Not convincing at all
- 26 2
- 18 3
- 14 4
- 6 5 – Extremely convincing
- 10 Not sure

19. High schools are doing a better job of encouraging qualified low-income or minority students to take AP courses.

- 9 1 – Not convincing at all
- 15 2
- 33 3
- 26 4
- 7 5 – Extremely convincing
- 11 Not sure

How close does each of the following statements about AP come to your own view? (Applies to Q20-24)

20. Offering AP is the single most important way for high schools to serve and challenge advanced students in key subjects.

- 35 Very close
- 45 Somewhat close
- 13 Not too close
- 6 Not close at all
- 1 Not sure

21. Many parents push their children into AP classes when they really don't belong there.

- 19 Very close
- 41 Somewhat close
- 29 Not too close
- 10 Not close at all
- 1 Not sure

22. My school is too eager to expand AP participation just to improve its ranking and reputation.

- 12 Very close
- 22 Somewhat close
- 32 Not too close
- 33 Not close at all
- 2 Not sure

23. Too many students overestimate their abilities and are in over their heads when they take AP classes.

- 15 Very close
- 41 Somewhat close
- 33 Not too close
- 11 Not close at all
- 1 Not sure

24. Many teachers avoid teaching AP classes because it's too demanding.

- 29 Very close
- 35 Somewhat close
- 19 Not too close
- 12 Not close at all
- 4 Not sure

Here are some statements about AP exams. Thinking about the AP exams you are familiar with, how close does each of the following come to your own view? (Applies to Q25-Q29)

25. AP exams do an effective job of maintaining the quality of AP courses across the country.

- 40 Very close
- 46 Somewhat close
- 8 Not too close
- 3 Not close at all
- 2 Not sure

26. The knowledge that there's an AP exam waiting for students at the end of the course helps to focus and motivate students.

- 39 Very close
- 41 Somewhat close
- 15 Not too close
- 4 Not close at all
- * Not sure

27. My students' AP exam scores at least partly reflect how well I taught the class.

- 24 Very close
- 54 Somewhat close
- 14 Not too close
- 6 Not close at all
- 2 Not sure

28. The standards for grading AP exams have not been watered down—for example, a score of 3 means the same thing today as it did five years ago.

- 36 Very close
- 33 Somewhat close
- 8 Not too close
- 6 Not close at all
- 16 Not sure

29. The material covered on the AP exams aligns well with the curriculum and learning objectives of the courses.

- 48 Very close
- 42 Somewhat close
- 6 Not too close
- 2 Not close at all
- 2 Not sure

30. Does your high school

- 30 Require AP students to take the AP exam
- 40 Strongly encourage students to take it
- 30 Leave it up to individuals
- * Not sure

31. And what is your own view on students' taking the AP exam? Should AP students at your school

- 45 Be required to take the AP exam (with the cost covered, if necessary)
- 38 Be strongly encouraged to take it
- 16 Or should the decision to take the AP exam be left up to individuals
- * Not sure

32. There may be some students who could thrive in AP but do not end up taking these classes. Which of these comes closest to the most likely explanation for this?

- 56 They don't want the hard work and pressure.
- 30 They're afraid of getting lower grades.
- 4 The school fails to appropriately encourage them.
- 2 Their friends or peers aren't in these courses.
- 5 None of these/Something else
- 3 Not sure

33. Relative to their numbers in the student population at your school, do you think that African American and Hispanic students are underrepresented in AP classes, or not?

- 43 Yes, they are underrepresented
- 37 No, they are not
- 19 Not sure

Across the nation, African American and Hispanic students are often underrepresented in AP classes. Here are some possible explanations for why this is happening. How convincing is each explanation to you? Please answer on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not convincing at all and 5 is extremely convincing. (Applies to Q34-39)

34. African American and Hispanic students

Are more likely to come from families with lower levels of income and education

- 6 1 - Not convincing at all
- 10 2
- 26 3
- 33 4
- 17 5 - Extremely convincing
- 10 Not sure

35. African American and Hispanic students

Are often overlooked by high schools because of stereotypes or mistaken assumptions about their abilities

- 24 1 - Not convincing at all
- 26 2
- 21 3
- 16 4
- 5 5 - Extremely convincing
- 8 Not sure

36. African American and Hispanic students

Are often inadequately prepared in the lower grades

- 11 1 – Not convincing at all
- 17 2
- 28 3
- 24 4
- 11 5 – Extremely convincing
- 10 Not sure

37. African American and Hispanic students

Are less likely to be focused on the importance of college

- 12 1 – Not convincing at all
- 21 2
- 24 3
- 23 4
- 10 5 – Extremely convincing
- 11 Not sure

38. African American and Hispanic students

Are more likely to lack the confidence that they can handle AP coursework

- 6 1 – Not convincing at all
- 13 2
- 26 3
- 31 4
- 14 5 – Extremely convincing
- 10 Not sure

39. African American and Hispanic students

Are flooded by messages from a culture that holds low expectations for them

- 10 1 – Not convincing at all
- 13 2
- 23 3
- 28 4
- 15 5 – Extremely convincing
- 12 Not sure

40. Each year, Newsweek publishes a nationwide rating system of high schools that uses the ratio of students taking AP exams to rank high schools by quality. How familiar are you with this rating system?

- 22 Very familiar
- 30 Somewhat familiar
- 17 Not too familiar
- 30 Not at all familiar
- 1 Not sure

OF THOSE RESPONDING, VERY, SOMEWHAT OR NOT TOO FAMILIAR IN Q40 (n = 660)

41. How much impact do you think this rating system has had on your own high school's approach to the AP Program?

- 34 No impact
- 22 Only a little impact
- 26 Some impact
- 14 A lot of impact
- 4 Not sure

42. Generally speaking, do you think that ranking the quality of high schools by using the ratio of students taking AP exams is

- 17 Mostly a good idea
- 58 Mostly a bad idea
- 25 Not sure

Here are some suggestions people have made to change the AP program at the national level. For each, please indicate if you think it would generally improve the AP program, make it worse, or have little impact? (Applies to Q43-50)

43. Encourage more colleges to accept only high AP exam results (4 or 5) before granting college credit for AP courses.

- 23 Improve
- 51 Make It Worse
- 20 Have Little Impact
- 6 Not sure

44. Group students in AP sections by ability, so that, for example, the most advanced students learn together.

- 30 Improve
- 36 Make It Worse
- 25 Have Little Impact
- 9 Not sure

45. Limit the number of AP classes that students can take in a given semester.

- 39 Improve
- 19 Make It Worse
- 32 Have Little Impact
- 10 Not sure

46. Conduct more screening of students to ensure that they are ready to do AP-level work before they get in those classrooms.

- 63 Improve
- 12 Make It Worse
- 19 Have Little Impact
- 7 Not sure

47. Change the AP curriculum so that courses are less broad and cover greater depth.

- 40 Improve
- 21 Make It Worse
- 22 Have Little Impact
- 17 Not sure

48. Place firm limits on class size for AP, even if some students have to wait to take the course.

- 56 Improve
- 18 Make It Worse
- 19 Have Little Impact
- 7 Not sure

49. Rely more on online AP courses when just a few students in a school want a course or when the school has trouble finding suitable teachers.

- 25 Improve
- 39 Make It Worse
- 16 Have Little Impact
- 20 Not sure

50. Require all students in AP classes to take the AP exam, with financial aid provided for needy students.

- 56 Improve
- 20 Make It Worse
- 18 Have Little Impact
- 7 Not sure

51. For how many years have you been a public school teacher?

- 19 Less than or equal to 10
- 33 11-20 years
- 48 21 or more years

52. And for how many years have you been teaching AP courses?

- 31 Less than or equal to 5
- 32 6-10 years
- 38 11 or more years

53. What AP subject area do you primarily teach? (If you teach more than one subject area, please choose the one you teach most.)

- 1 Computer Science
- 20 English
- 5 Fine Arts/Music
- 5 Foreign/World Languages
- 18 History (Government, Geography, U.S., World/Culture)
- 26 Mathematics
- 21 Science (Biology, Chemistry, Physics)
- 3 Social Sciences (Anthropology, Economics, Psychology)
- 1 Something else

54. Generally speaking, what percentage of your students typically take the AP exam?

- 2 None take the AP exam
- 14 1%-25%
- 8 26%-50%
- 11 51%-75%
- 64 76%-100%
- 1 Not sure

55. Over the past five years, has the percentage of your students taking the AP exam

- 26 Increased
- 18 Decreased
- 53 Stayed about the same
- 3 Not sure

56. Generally speaking, what percentage of your students typically score 3 or better on the AP exam?

- 2 None score 3 or better
- 15 1%-25%
- 18 26%-50%
- 27 51%-75%
- 35 76%-100%
- 3 Not sure

57. And, over the past five years, have your students' AP exam scores

- 32 Been improving
- 18 Been declining
- 43 Stayed about the same
- 7 Not sure

58. Approximately what percentage of students at your school are eligible for the free or reduced lunch program?

- 1 None are eligible
- 30 1%-25%
- 24 26%-50%
- 16 51%-75%
- 8 76%-100%
- 21 Not sure

59. Which best describes your high school?

- 5 Inner city
- 23 Urban (not inner city)
- 39 Suburban
- 33 Rural

60. In what region is your high school?

- 27 Northeast
- 20 Midwest
- 33 South
- 20 West