

THE RIGHT QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT AN ADVANCED PLACEMENT PROGRAM AT YOUR SCHOOL

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- 1) What resources—people, time, space, materials—do AP courses require?
- 2) What are the opportunity costs of directing these resources at an AP program?
- 3) Does the AP curriculum challenge your students in the most appropriate possible ways?
- 4) Is your AP program built on barriers? Do your policies exclude students from certain high-level courses that are proclaimed to be the “best” or most desirable in the school?
- 5) Given a roomful of motivated and curious students and a passionate, expert instructor, does an AP curriculum offer the best possible learning experience that could be devised at your school?
- 6) Does the AP program offer courses whose content and methodologies embody your school’s particular values and mission?
- 7) Do the content and methodologies of AP courses reflect your school’s commitment to diversity in all dimensions?
- 8) Is the “vertical team” approach to AP instruction in certain disciplines consonant with the philosophical and developmental nature of your departmental curricula?
- 9) Do you use a winnowing or sieving process to make AP classes the apex of a pyramid based on achievement or aptitude?
- 10) Who is “winnowed” out of taking AP courses? Do you track this, both individually and by demographics?
- 11) Do you have the confidence to promote students for college matriculation based on the internal standards established by the faculty at your school?
- 12) What is your school’s philosophical and practical commitment to curricular depth over breadth?

13) To what degree does the existence of an AP program at your school reflect the anxieties of constituents other than your faculty and students?

14) Is the AP program at your school designed to provide a challenging advanced curriculum or just to give your more ambitious students a transcript highlight for college admission?

15) Have you developed your policies around students enrolled in courses labeled "AP" taking the Advanced Placement examination based on the individual needs of students, or on anxieties around perceived institutional integrity?

16) Does your faculty have the expertise to design highly challenging and engaging advanced courses on their own, or does the use of an externally driven curriculum serve in lieu of helping them gain that expertise?

17) When was the last time you heard that a graduate of your school had used an accumulation of Advanced Placement credits to "place out" of a full year of college?

18) Do you track how often graduates of your school use Advanced Placement credit to place up into, rather than place out of, courses in college?

19) How are students assessed and evaluated for their work in existing AP courses? Are AP examination scores a part of the school-based evaluation?

20) Are your AP teachers teaching a subject, or are they teaching to a test?

21) Does your school weight the grades given students in AP courses in computing GPA or class rank? Have you collected and analyzed data to assure yourself that this weighting is equitable?

22) Is teaching AP in your school considered a prestigious assignment? If yes, is this because it's "AP," or because teachers truly believe it is the best curriculum, or because teachers see teaching a select group of students as a "plum"?

23) Do you believe that having an AP program adds luster to your entire curriculum? If so, do you then offer AP course enrollment to every student?

24) Who pays for students to take Advanced Placement examinations at your school?

25) Where would you begin in the development of an internally designed program that would replace Advanced Placement courses?

26) If you do not already have Advanced Placement courses, are you afraid that not having them will jeopardize your students' chances at college admission?

27) If you do already offer Advanced Placement courses, are you afraid that discontinuing them will jeopardize your students' chances at college admission?

28) If you do already offer AP courses, what do you anticipate the public costs would be of supplanting them with internally designed courses?

29) What data or evidence would be helpful to your school in your circumstances in deciding to discontinue or not implement an AP program? How would you collect the data?

30) To which constituencies would you be most answerable if you were to consider either discontinuing or not implementing an AP program? How would you address their concerns?

31) Do the concerns of Advanced Placement teachers in your school inhibit movement toward schedule reform or other curricular improvement that would otherwise benefit all students?

32) Do public schools in your area offer a more established and broader array of AP courses than your school is able to? If so, are your efforts to maintain your own program underplaying your school's unique strengths and values in an arena where it may be difficult or impossible to establish a competitive advantage, anyway?

33) Does the perceived pressure of "having" to have AP courses on the transcript drain good, excited students away from arts, electives, and other challenging, exciting courses that don't bear the AP label?

34) What would your school do when faced with the dilemma of having a sign-up for an AP course that was very small (and thus "expensive" to staff) or very large (and thus necessitating either paring down or adding a section)?

35) Does the calendar of Advanced Placement examinations in May impede the development of meaningful end-of-year programs for upper-grade students at your school? Or does it otherwise interfere with other worthy or potentially valuable programs, academic or co-curricular?