

## *Aligning Advanced Courses in High School Task Force*

November 30, 2016 10:30 a.m. to 12 p.m.

District Office, Room 212

*Meeting started at 10:35 a.m.*

### Introduction

Prateek Dutta, Doctoral Resident, welcomed everyone to the task force meeting and stated the bulk of the conversation will revolve around Advanced Placement classes. On a PowerPoint slide, he gave the following goals for the meeting:

- Examine districtwide data on Advanced Placement classes
- Create a districtwide vision for AP classes and exams

Prateek said the meeting will be focused on numbers and data. He passed out the “ladder of inference,” and urged all participants to “stay low” on the ladder by just observing data and not drawing conclusions.

Afterward, Prateek passed out a handout that illustrates the number of students who have enrolled in AP classes at the three different comprehensive high schools for the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years. In addition to enrollment, the handout gave the amount of students who earned a score between 1-5 in each of schools, and the racial breakdown in each of the schools. After participants looked through the handout, there was a wide-ranging conversation on what people observed. Prominent themes/observations were:

- Squalicum has more students taking AP and taking the corresponding test than the other two comprehensive high schools combined, but also had the most students earning a “1” or a 2.
- The gap between Hispanic and white students was much larger at Bellingham and Sehome high schools than it was at Squalicum High School. At Squalicum High School, the white/Hispanic gap was nearly eliminated.
- Squalicum has a policy that has opened up AP access to all students and expects all students to take the test. To what extent should this be replicated across the district?

Prateek then asked Dr. James Everett, Squalicum principal, to explain why Squalicum chose to pursue a different path and offer some of the positives and the drawbacks from that course of action.

The committee engaged in a discussion on the benefits and drawbacks of expecting students who enroll in an AP class to take the AP test. The discussion can be summarized below:

The belief system undergirding the philosophy that all students who enroll in an AP class **should take the AP test can be boiled down to the following:**

- Creates a strong culture of team camaraderie (Our class vs the test)

- Racial and socio-economic equity (Those that opt out are usually the ones who are not confident and have been told they aren't smart enough)
- Possibly attain college credit
- A way to show what you have learned as compared to students throughout the nation/world
- Participating students who qualify for free/reduced lunch receive a significant discount
- Demonstrates follow-through and 'grit'

However, there are also **some drawbacks for expecting students to take the test:**

- The cost. If a student is taking two AP tests, and has a sibling taking two AP tests, a family pays nearly \$400 (if family income is above the poverty line).
- Places a burden on families who are embarrassed to ask the school district for help.
- In a lot of cases, AP test scores do not count for college credit. Therefore, students/families are taking a test with no clear benefit. This could be perceived as a waste of time.
- Increases anxiety - especially for those that do not believe they are "good" test takers.
- Potentially to be perceived as a "test-driven" course, and has little latitude for the 'whole child' approach.

After this discussion, task force participants were in general agreement that if schools or the district expect students to take the AP test, then they should pay for it. However, participants were mostly divided on this topic, and Prateek concluded the meeting by saying they will continue to have this conversation at the next meeting, on January 8.

*Meeting ended at 12:02 p.m.*