

# More and Better Advanced Placement: Educator Feedback on Possible Strategies for Improving Participation and Success

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School of Education



# OVERVIEW

- 1) GEAR UP Overview
- 2) GEAR UP & AP Classes
- 3) What defines success in an AP class?
- 4) AP Qualitative Study
  - a) Methods
  - b) Questions
  - c) Results
- 5) Conclusions

# SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE EVALUATION IN EDUCATION (SREED)

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- Work with a variety of clients to provide them with timely and actionable information about a variety of educational programs and policies



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# WHAT IS GEAR UP?

GEAR UP = **G**aining **E**arly **A**wareness and **R**eadiness for **U**ndergraduate **P**rograms

In 2011, Milwaukee Public Schools was awarded a 7-year, \$14.87 million federal GEAR UP grant to promote college awareness and readiness, as well as increase high school graduation rates at selected schools in the district

The grant provides outreach to students from the high school classes of 2017 and 2018, through a variety of programming and support systems

TEAM GEAR UP (TGU) Staff work full time with eight different high schools throughout the district

# MPS GEAR UP HIGH SCHOOLS

- Audubon
- Bay View
- Bradley Tech
- Hamilton
- James Madison
- Milwaukee HS of the Arts
- Morse-Marshall
- Vincent

# AP CLASSES IN GEAR UP SCHOOLS

- Advanced Placement classes are offered through the College Board
- There is agreement that exposing students to rigorous coursework is beneficial for academic success
- AP classes are one way that students can be exposed to rigorous material
- Recently, students in GEAR UP schools are underrepresented in AP classes, and nearly half of all students enrolled in AP classes receive a “D” or “U”

# GEAR UP AP OBJECTIVE

- MPS Team GEAR UP is acting on the belief that it is beneficial for students to take AP courses, as the exposure to an AP class can help build college level skills
- An objective of Team GEAR UP has been to increase the number of students **enrolling and succeeding** in AP classes to 25%

# WHAT DEFINES SUCCESS IN AN AP CLASS?

Exposure to the class

Passing the class and  
passing the AP Exam

Taking and failing an  
AP class

Passing the class, failing  
or not taking the AP  
Exam

- ***Are there benefits for students who take AP classes even if they fail the class itself?***

# WHAT EVIDENCE SUPPORTS THE BENEFITS OF AP?

- Exposure to rigorous coursework in high school is directly correlated to college success <sup>1, 2</sup>
- Passing an AP exam is a strong predictor of college success <sup>3</sup>
- Additional research suggests there are benefits for students taking AP classes even if they fail the AP exam or don't take the AP exam <sup>4</sup>

1 Hallett, R. E., & Venegas, K. M. (2011). Is increased access enough? Advanced placement courses, quality, and success in low-income urban schools. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 34(3), 468-487.

2 Horn, L., Kojaku, L. K., & Carroll, C. D. (2001). High school academic curriculum and the persistence path through college: Persistence and transfer behavior of undergraduates 3 years after entering 4-year institutions. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2001/2001163.pdf>

3 Adelman, C. (2006). The toolbox revisited: Paths to degree completion from high school through college. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://knowledgecenter.completionbydesign.org/sites/default/files/58%20Adelman%20toolbox%20revisited%202006.Pdf>

4 Dougherty, C., Mellor, L., & Jian, S. (2006). The Relationship between Advanced Placement and college graduation. 2005 AP study series, report 1. National Center for Educational Accountability. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED519365>

# CRITICAL AP QUESTION

***How do we increase participation in AP classes, while also including efforts to improve how well students perform in these rigorous classes?***

# PROPOSED AP MODIFICATIONS TO INCREASE STUDENT ENROLLMENT AND PERFORMANCE

Proposed Modification	Definition
<b>Using predictive data to recruit students</b>	Providing information to schools to assist in enrolling students in AP classes
<b>Implementing weighted grades for AP classes</b>	Giving letter grades in AP courses a higher numerical value when calculating GPA, due to the rigor of the course
<b>Providing a trial period</b>	Allowing students a certain amount of time to test a class before deciding if they would like to remain enrolled
<b>Offering more non-prerequisite AP classes</b>	Offering more AP classes that would not require students to have passed specific classes before enrolling
<b>Offering AP classes pass/fail</b>	Providing students the ability to take an AP class for credit without receiving a letter grade
<b>Providing support staff during AP classes</b>	Having a person responsible for assisting a lead teacher in an AP class

# AP PREDICTIVE DATA

- In 2015-2016 we worked with UW Madison to help **identify students who have a good chance of success** in AP classes.
- We **used prior school performance, achievement, and attendance** to inform this process.
- We found that there were **more students with a good chance of success** in AP classes who were not taking AP than there were in AP classes.
- We **provided lists of students to schools** that included their likelihood of succeeding (getting a C or better) to help them in their recruitment efforts.

## BY SUBJECT:

# SAMPLE DATA

Student ID	Student Name	Predicted Grade (4 point scale)	Chance of Getting a C or better
1111111	Student Name	3.1	87%
1111112	Student Name	2.8	82%
1111113	Student Name	2.5	68%
1111114	Student Name	2.4	68%
1111115	Student Name	2.4	65%
1111116	Student Name	2.3	62%
1111117	Student Name	2.2	60%
1111118	Student Name	2.2	59%
1111119	Student Name	2.2	57%
1111120	Student Name	2.2	57%
1111121	Student Name	2.1	55%
1111122	Student Name	2.0	49%
1111123	Student Name	2.0	49%
1111124	Student Name	2.0	48%
1111125	Student Name	1.9	48%
1111126	Student Name	1.9	45%
1111127	Student Name	1.8	42%
1111128	Student Name	1.8	41%
1111129	Student Name	1.8	41%
1111130	Student Name	1.7	37%
1111131	Student Name	1.4	27%
1111132	Student Name	1.4	27%
1111133	Student Name	1.3	22%
1111134	Student Name	1.2	20%
1111135	Student Name	1.2	20%
1111136	Student Name	1.2	19%

# NEXT STEPS IN AP PREDICTIVE DATA

- We will **again be providing MPS with predictions** for each MPS student regarding their likelihood of succeeding in AP classes.
- We will **use fall 2016 information** to inform our predictions.
- **Predictions for sophomore, junior, and senior students** will be available and distributed to schools in February 2017.

# WHAT ARE SOME ADDITIONAL IDEAS TO INCREASE STUDENT ENROLLMENT AND PERFORMANCE IN AP CLASSES?

Open Enrollment

Increase AP Course Offerings

AP Preparation Programs

Provide more Professional Development to AP Teachers



# AP QUALITATIVE STUDY

# WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

**to collect information from teachers about aspects of Advanced Placement (AP) courses that both promote and inhibit student participation and success**

# METHODOLOGY

- evaluators audio recorded **one-on-one interviews**
- entered responses into database, data were compiled for each question and **themes were identified**
- recordings were referenced for **participant quotes** and further details
- questions related to proposed strategies for improvement, **responses were coded** to be positive, negative, or mixed based on the response of the participant.

# WHO WAS INTERVIEWED?

**38 AP teachers interviewed**

8 GEAR UP Schools

6 counselor interviews

3+ teachers interviewed per GEAR UP School

15 = average years of teaching experience

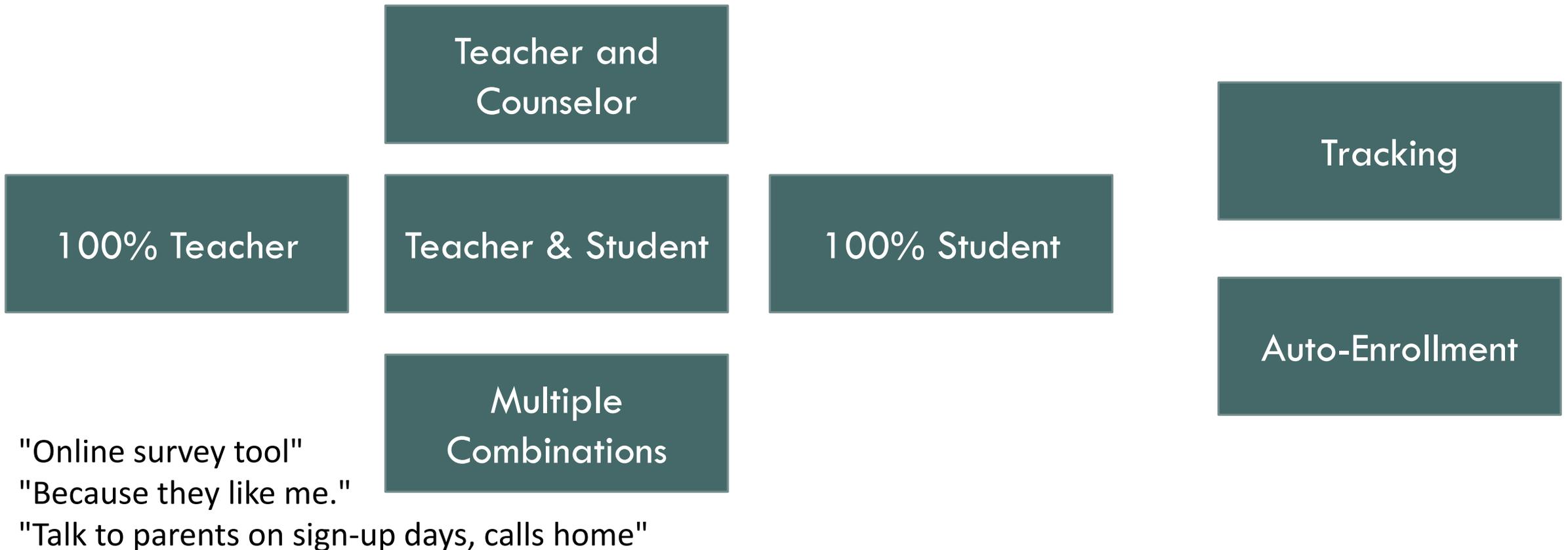
5 = average years teaching AP

# AP EVALUATION QUESTIONS

1. How are students **recruited and selected** for AP classes?
2. How did teachers view **proposed strategies** to increase AP enrollment & performance?
3. What additional ideas did educators have for **improving student AP performance**?
4. What **professional development and support** do MPS AP teachers want?

# HOW ARE STUDENTS BEING SELECTED FOR AP CLASSES?

# HOW ARE STUDENTS BEING SELECTED FOR AP CLASSES?



# CASE STUDIES

## Tracking

“The majority in my AP class were in honors before. “Try to push some others from non Honors classes as well. Discussion among teachers about who to include. Honors is a totally different curriculum with lots of texts, rhetoric. Regular classes don't cover that material.”

## Vertical teaming

“Collaborating - vertical teaming. We have a lot to offer other schools. We used to have kids unclear about AP. Having honors changed everything. This concept allows us to work together as a staff”

# CASE STUDIES

## Signed-Off

All placement come from teacher recommendations. “Now their current [subject] teacher has to sign off for them to take AP and I have to sign as well. I interview students who are interested. If they need a little remedial work that's fine. I accept everyone that is recommended.”

## Auto-Enrollment

I wasn't a part of enrollment. A lot of it were kids that got funneled in. . . 60% kids that should be in here, 40% no business.

# WHO SHOULD BE IN AP?

"We would probably benefit from a set (recruitment) system. Specifically because we have biases as teachers and we come from backgrounds with an idea of what an AP student looks like, normally this vision of a studious kid with a full book bag, a hyper-vigilant anxious kid. But that **bias really hinders the AP system, slows us down, and impacts our judgement. Students we hand-pick, sometimes we are way off.** I call some students 'Dark Horses.' 'Kuju' is a dark horse. He really enjoyed being in my class and got a 4 on the exam. I wouldn't have expected that."

# HOW DID TEACHERS VIEW PROPOSED STRATEGIES TO INCREASE AP ENROLLMENT & PERFORMANCE?

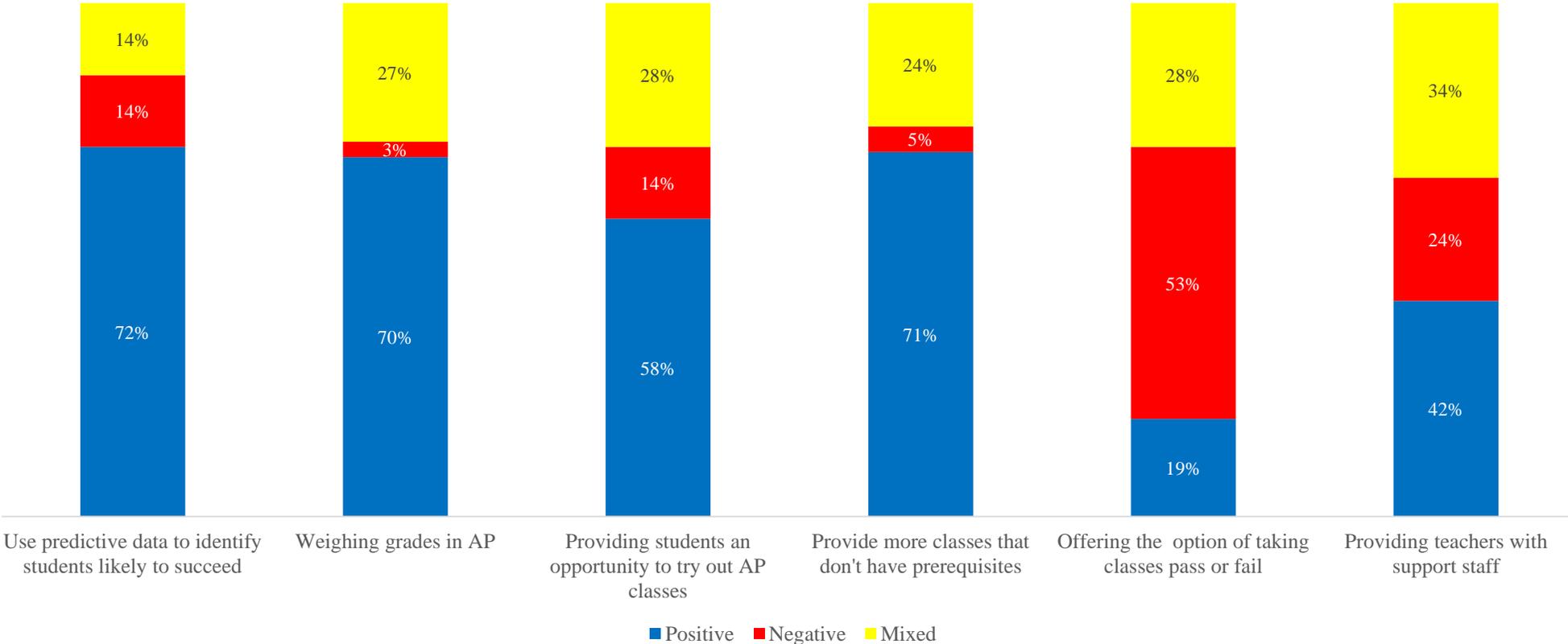
# TEACHER OPINIONS ON PROPOSED MODIFICATIONS FOR AP CLASSES



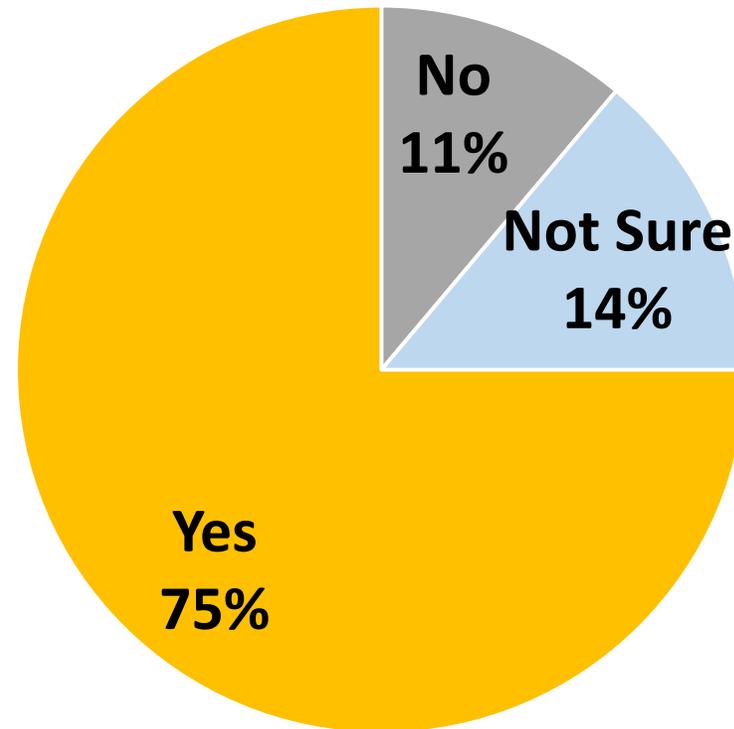
Proposed Modification	% Positive Responses	% Negative Responses	% Mixed Responses	Key Benefits	Key Concerns
Predictive Data	72	14	14	-validate current enrollment practices	-fear that it could be used to exclude students from classes
Weighted Grades	70	3	27	-rewards students for taking challenging classes	-dissatisfaction with current implementation -students may not understand the concept of weighted grades
Testing Period	58	14	28	-try classes without punishment for exiting	-lack of clarity on duration, feasibility in scheduling -who makes decision to withdraw?

# WHAT WERE TEACHER REACTIONS TO PROPOSED AP MODIFICATIONS?

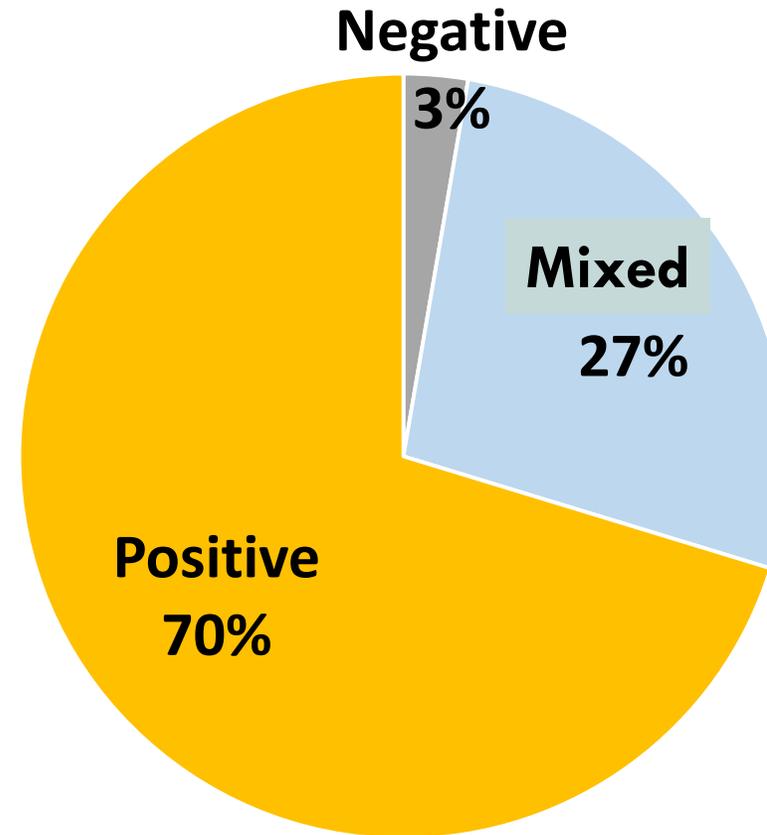
Teacher reactions to proposed changes to AP



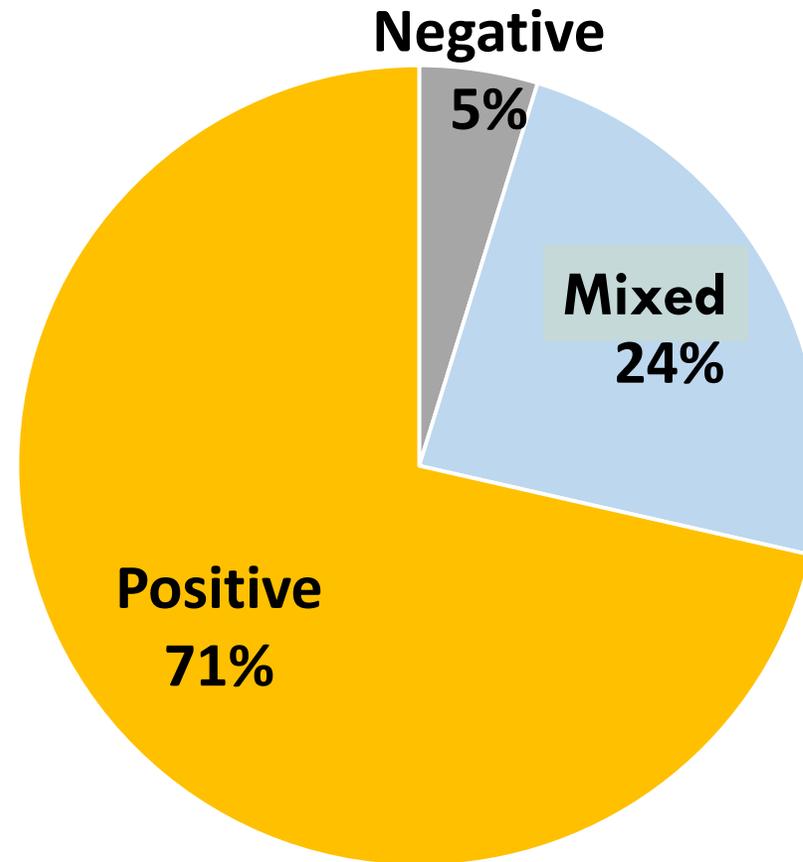
Teachers responses to "Do you believe AP predictive data can be helpful for recruitment?"



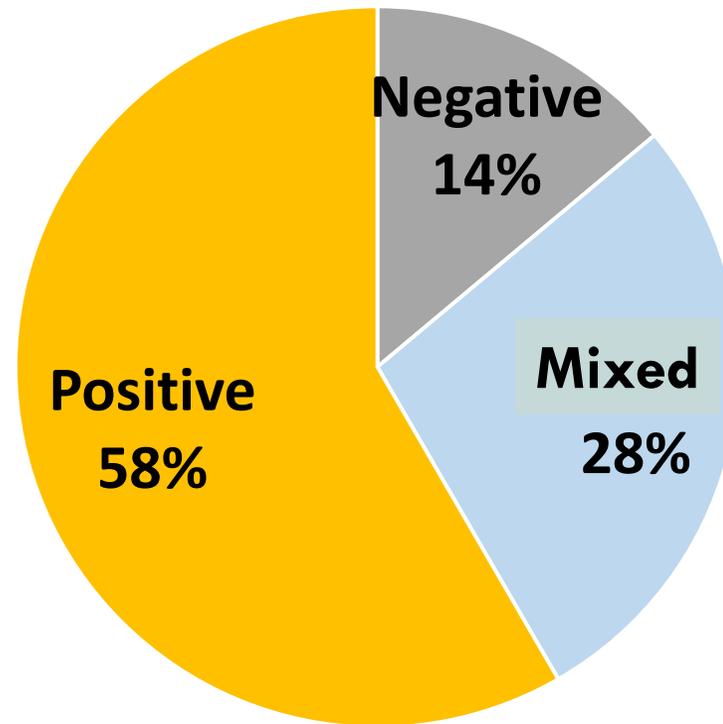
## Teachers opinions on using weighted grades in AP



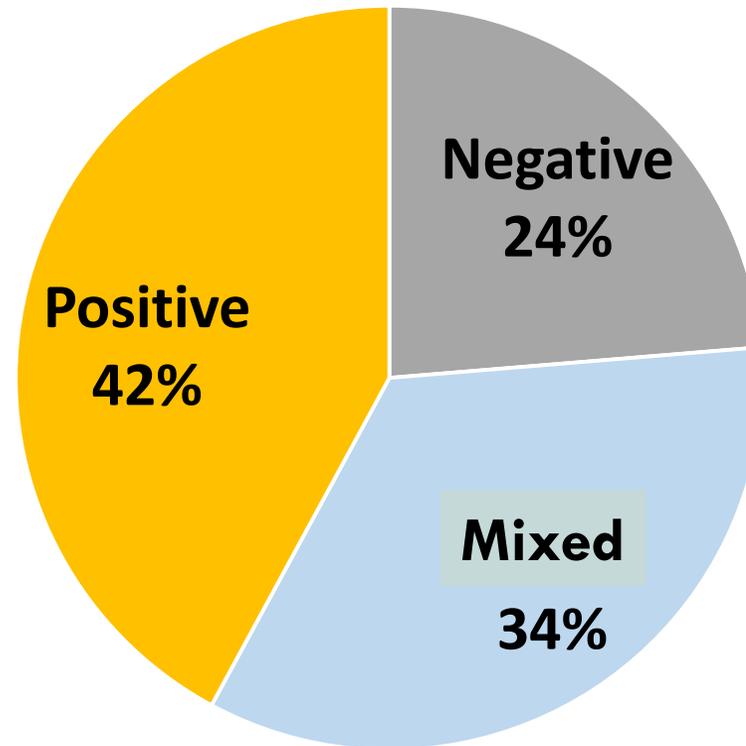
## Teacher opinions on promoting AP classes without traditional prerequisites



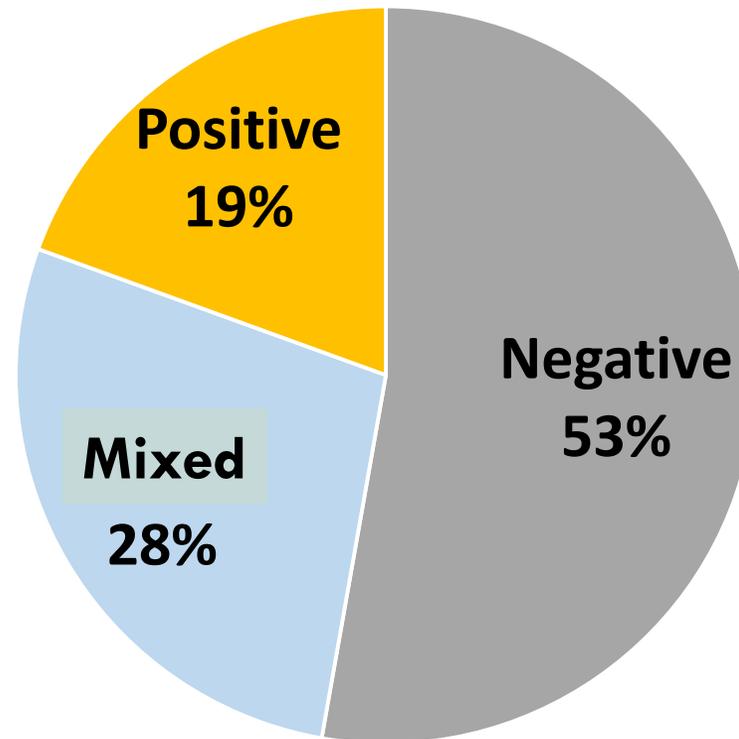
## Teacher opinions on having a testing period for AP



## Teacher opinions on having hired support staff in AP



## Teacher opinions on offering AP classes pass/fail



# WHAT ARE SOME ADDITIONAL IDEAS TO IMPROVE STUDENT AP PERFORMANCE?

# ADDITIONAL AP STRATEGIES

Vertical Teaming and  
Collaboration

Study Hall

Tutoring

Smaller Class Sizes

Stricter screening of  
students before AP  
Enrollment

Start school year earlier

Block Scheduling for AP  
Classes

**Building an AP Culture**

**Enhance Study Skills and Time  
Management**

**Increase Family Engagement**

**Ensure AP alignment and readiness**

# BUILDING AP CULTURE AND EXPECTATIONS

Building higher expectations

Culture shift: punitive → academic

Ensuring students understand AP demands

Really celebrating academic achievements

“You have got to change the culture. We do not have a culture of academics. Is the culture punitive or about learning? I can't punish everyone, and don't want to punish everyone for the few”

# ENHANCE STUDY SKILLS AND TIME MANAGEMENT

"Kids don't know how to prioritize their time. Required to help teach and implement study plans, to prepare for tests, manage time, to prepare appropriately."

How to organize work

How to work efficiently

Prioritizing time to complete assignments

Building preparation skills to succeed on the AP exam

# ENSURE AP ALIGNMENT AND READINESS

Challenging students before high school

Building up background institutional knowledge

Comprehensive pre-enrollment communication  
(parents, students, teachers, counselors)

Systematic alignment of AP classes

"We need prep for the kids to get them ready. Build up classes, need to start before they get to high school. It needs to start in middle and grade school. Social passing does not help our kids."

# INCREASE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Emphasize rigor, importance of AP

Discuss creation of study spaces at home

Include parents early and often in discussions about AP course requirements, important dates

"Some kids have reasons they can't study at home, they don't have a dedicated space for studying. Some are babysitting."

# LACK OF ALIGNMENT IN PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH TO AP CLASSES

- According to the AP website, the College Board's Advanced Placement Program® enables students to pursue college level studies — with the opportunity to earn college credit, advanced placement, or both — while still in high school
- How do AP teachers view their approach to how their class should be taught?

# AP IS A COLLEGE CLASS

**"This is a college class. I run it like a college class. They give me the excuse, they say this is high school. There is no hand holding."**

**"Want them to get real experience of having a college class."**

# AP DOESN'T MEAN COLLEGE

**"AP doesn't mean college.** Teachers need to make sure the structure of the AP class, while teaching college-level material, is still appropriate for high school students. Empower them a little, and need to work on the scaffolding so that maybe by the end of the class the course can look more like it has college structure. For example, this means being flexible with deadlines, allowing students to have a window to make up a test.

**We're shaping kids, that doesn't happen over night."**

# AP IS COLLEGE PREPARATION

**“Don't want kids to just get into college- want them sold on the idea that they feel better prepared for college having taken this class.”**

# CONCLUSIONS

- *Schools need to **improve AP alignment***
- *With the district emphasis on AP inclusiveness, it is imperative that **systematic challenges be addressed** in order to improve student performance.*
- *When considering proposed AP course modifications, it is important to **engage key stakeholders**.*

# CONCLUSIONS (CONT.)

- *MPS should continually reinforce key AP course information for teachers*
- *There are complicated socio-cultural contexts within schools that are barriers to student achievement*
- *Schools should take into account student and family voices when considering extra academic supports for AP students.*



**A BIG thank you to teachers  
for sharing with us!**



*Serving the Classes of 2017 and 2018  
En beneficio de las promociones de 2017 y 2018*

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