



CASE STUDY 1: ACCESS FOR ALL

English Sequence Options for AP Seminar Promotes Equity

The Journey

We noticed that our accelerated students exited our AP® offerings at the end of their junior year because we ran out of AP English course offerings. So, we adopted AP Seminar in the 2017-18 school year as a core English course for 40 students, who were mostly seniors.

In the 2018-19 school year, student interest grew tremendously, and we had 75 students in grades 10 and 11 register to take the course. We came to realize our Honors program wasn't preparing students for AP coursework, so in 2021, we dissolved Honors, which increased AP Seminar enrollment to 175.

We later adopted Pre-AP® English 1 as a replacement for our Honors courses. We knew that adding AP Seminar to our English sequence would engage more students because of its project based assessments and skills-based framework. We also knew that introducing Pre-AP would lead to stronger outcomes for our students who needed more support. We felt confident that the skills in Pre-AP English 1 and 2 would serve as a strong foundation for AP Seminar.

Implementation Process

The process of adopting AP Seminar required a true mindset shift. Before establishing AP Seminar as a flexible English offering, only students from our Gifted and Talented program had the opportunity to take the course. After the transition we shifted our AP enrollment policies, removing barriers like prerequisite grades and teacher recommendations.

Getting our Guidance Department on board with the decision to make AP Seminar a requirement for our Early College program was just the beginning. The decision to replace the Honors track with Pre-AP and allow sophomores to take AP Seminar in lieu of ELA II undoubtedly sparked varied opinions and concerns.

Parents were hesitant to transition their kids from Honors to AP, but over time our teachers were able to help parents see the gains their children made due to the rigorous coursework. Word quickly spread about the expanded

DISTRICT:

Fall River Public Schools

SCHOOL:

BMC Durfee High School

LOCATION:

Fall River, MA

MEET THE ADMINISTRATOR



Tanya Bernier

Dean of English Language Arts

SCHOOL STATS

2,460

Students enrolled

217

Students enrolled in AP Seminar

78%

Low income



- 50% White
- 30% Hispanic or Latino
- 10% Black
- 5% Asian
- 5% Other

access to the course, which also helped our enrollment increase in other AP classes—including AP English Language and AP English Literature. Students reported that they felt more prepared, and the “AP label” was less intimidating.

We also established a dedicated professional learning community for our AP Seminar teachers to plan together. It was important that our teachers discussed how they were aligning the Massachusetts Standards for English language arts in their thematic units for AP Seminar. They also discussed preparation plans for the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), our grade 10 end-of-course exam.

We relocated classrooms so that AP Seminar teachers were physically closer together. We set aside funds for College Board–provided professional learning, the AP Summer Institute at the onset and an additional implementation support series after the launch. We also added AP Seminar to the AP Saturday collaboration session as a way for our teachers to meet and discuss planning with teachers across the district teaching in different schools. Our AP Seminar teachers often facilitate workshops for other teachers (even in other departments) so that they can learn about their methods and apply them to their courses as well.

Our AP Seminar Teachers

Once trained, our teachers truly hit the ground running! They loved teaching the course because of the student-driven framework. Outside of modeling the skills first, our teachers tend to give tons of feedback to their students and help them apply the learned skills to the topics of their choice. So, as a teacher, it became incredibly important to create feedback loops and establish performance-based assessment opportunities where students could feel comfortable taking risks in front of others who were also learning how to apply the skills. Over time in our English department, our narrative became what skills do we need to develop here versus how many books will we get through this year.

“Over time in our English department, our narrative became what skills do we need to develop here versus how many books will we get through this year. We believe that AP® Seminar was the foundational course for our English sequence.”

— TANYA BERNIER, DEAN OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS, B.M.C. DURFEE HIGH SCHOOL, MASSACHUSETTS

ADMINISTRATOR TO ADMINISTRATOR

- 1 Be brave:** Fight for your students.
- 2 Be patient:** Encourage your students to stick with it and not switch out of the course during the first semester. Some will be overwhelmed at first, but in time they will feel more comfortable, particularly with the public speaking piece.
- 3 Trust the Process:** Take your teachers’ input into consideration.
- 4 Educate Your Counselors:** Schedule a meeting with your counselors to explain the course and support their conversations with students when they ask to switch out of the course.
- 5 Involve the Parents:** Showcase student presentations with parents.