

AP English Success

Eleanor Roosevelt High School (Greenbelt, Maryland)

Eleanor Roosevelt High School's underserved AP students increased their 3+ scores from 28% to 39% from 2007 to 2010.



Teaching Words' Worth

Located in a suburb of the District of Columbia, Eleanor Roosevelt High School's success in AP English is due in large part to the school's highly structured writing program. Students in ninth, 10th and 11th grades are assigned essays similar to, but perhaps less intense than, those found on the AP Exam. Teachers focus on language — looking closely at rhetorical strategies, literary devices and diction in the essay, regardless of the student's level of reading or writing. In the AP classroom, 80 percent of a student's grade is based on in-class and out-of-class essays. English teachers follow a grading system that mirrors how AP Readers score at the annual AP Reading — 40 percent structure, 40 percent content, 10 percent mechanics and 10 percent style. The English department holds in-service days where teachers group-grade papers to ensure that all teachers are utilizing these same guidelines.

All English teachers, even those who do not teach AP classes, are encouraged to attend AP training sessions. Teacher Susan Vincent acts as the department's writing coordinator, working with English teachers at all grade levels by giving second reads on essays, observing in the classrooms and modeling writing lessons. For example, when the county required all ninth-graders to read and write an essay on *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Vincent took the assigned general essay topic, expanded it to make it more like an AP Exam prompt, constructed lesson plans for teachers, and held an in-service session where teachers could share ideas about the writing assignment.

Ready to Write

By the time a student first walks into an AP class, he or she has already written at least six AP-comparable essays and is familiar with the style of AP Exam questions and AP scoring. Because everyone in the English department is viewed as an AP teacher, both ninth- and 10th-grade teachers are included when recognition is received for exemplary AP English scores. All of the teachers can then take pride in the success that the 11th- and 12th-grade students have on their AP Exams.

What you need:

- An experienced AP teacher/writing coordinator provided with an extra planning period.
- Experienced English teachers who will help mentor and train any English teacher new to the school.
- Coordination of writing assignments for the numerous poems, short stories and almost all of the novels taught in the English classes.
- Previously published AP free-response questions used to teach writing on each grade level.

What you need to know:

Several years ago, the English department received a writing grant and used it to construct the writing program. Eleanor Roosevelt High School now defines itself as a writing school. When hiring teachers, the administration looks for hardworking individuals willing to spend long hours grading essays. Budget cuts have posed a challenge, because the number of in-service days for English teachers has been cut from nearly a dozen in the 1990s to just two last year.

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"Our English teachers clearly believe all students can become critical thinkers and effective writers. Therefore, our program focuses on writing tasks beginning in grade nine and continuing through all four grades. Students spend time discussing a text both in large and small groups. They outline, produce rough drafts, peer edit, and write final papers. Additional opportunities are provided to rewrite and to review sample papers."

— Susan Vincent, ERHS Writing Coordinator

Demographics

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