

One-Day Introduction to AP

Eastside High School (Gainesville, Florida)

Eastside High School's underserved AP students grew from 21% to 30% of its total AP population from 2007 to 2010.



Creating Community

What was the catalyst behind the recent impressive growth of the AP program at Eastside High School? Over the past few years, the school has incorporated 19 AP courses, and 80 to 90 percent of its AP population is made up of underserved students. The One-Day Intro to AP began as a way to build a sense of AP community among the students and to make AP more inclusive.

In the spring, letters are sent to incoming ninth-graders, along with new AP students and their parents inviting them to attend the One-Day Intro to AP during teacher-planning week before school begins. The invitation welcomes students and parents alike to share in a free meal and learn about Eastside's AP program. The participants start together and then separate into four or five smaller groups to follow a minischedule that provides them with an AP experience. Teachers hold 10-minute sessions in which they challenge both the students and their parents with an interactive exercise that represents their AP class. Student government representatives give tours of the campus, making the One-Day Intro to AP an introduction to both the school and to its AP program.

The introduction has evolved into an ongoing effort to build a sense of an AP community throughout the year. Every nine weeks a breakout session is held for all of the AP students over a full or half school day, depending on the activity or topic being covered. During the year, each of the four sessions highlights a different subject: social science, English, science and math. For example, for a social science session, students will watch a historical video or one dealing with current social or political issues, and then break into smaller groups to discuss the topic with teacher and student facilitators working to boost the debate. For a science session, a physics professor visited from a local college and did hands-on lab activities with the students.

We're a Team

Students are excited about AP and their classes because it is no longer just work. Now there is a community atmosphere, and students can share experiences with one another. Similarly, the teachers are operating as a team, helping one another with their challenges. Establishing an early connection has improved parental involvement as parents get to know AP teachers and what they have to offer as well as what they expect from their AP students.



"When I first started here, the AP courses offered at our school were sporadic, and there was no sense of an AP community. We needed to become a team. The effort started from the top down — our principal believed it, we believed it and now our students believe it."

— Natalie Strappy, Activities Director/Assistant Athletic Director

What you need:

- An AP director to facilitate the One-Day Intro to AP and plan the four in-school sessions.
- Group planning meetings, in May and in June, with follow-up e-mails to remind people of their various responsibilities.
- A meeting room. Eastside meets in its media center and then in individual teacher's rooms.
- Food and drink budget (including funds for pizza for 50 to 70 people plus an additional amount for sodas and water).

What you need to know:

Getting parents involved and keeping them involved is instrumental to the program's success. The teachers at Eastside are doing whatever it takes — sending letters, making phone calls, and using incentives such as dinner — to reach parents. Because of budget cuts, Eastside no longer has an AP director. The AP teachers are now breaking up the responsibilities surrounding the One-Day Intro to AP and taking turns planning the four in-school follow-up sessions.

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Demographics

Eastside High School
Gainesville, Florida

