

Pushing Underrepresented Students Higher (PUSH)

Riverwood International Charter School (Sandy Springs, Georgia)

Riverwood High School's underserved AP students grew from 12% to 17% of its total AP population from 2007 to 2010.



Reaching Skeptical Students

Concerned with low AP® enrollment among their underserved students, the administration at Riverwood sought out seniors who were doing well, but who never took any AP classes, and asked them why. What had kept them from taking an AP class? Doing this helped administrators identify two areas that needed improvement: awareness and support. In an effort to strengthen both, Lenora Patterson and her colleagues started the Pushing Underrepresented Students Higher (PUSH) program based on information learned from the sessions she attended with colleagues at an AP Summer Institute for Administrators and the AP Annual Conference.

Utilizing AP Potential™, a research-driven, free web-based tool that can help schools identify AP students (appotential.collegeboard.org), and students' first-semester grades, they identified a group of 40 students who were given special invitations for the school's AP night. During AP night, the school hosted a separate session for African American and Hispanic students and their parents that focused on the benefits of taking AP courses. By using a specific invitation, the school staff hoped to raise awareness among these students and their families. The school also wanted to develop a relationship that would encourage check-ins with students throughout the course and to offer whatever support may be needed. Student feedback from this group quickly informed new PUSH initiatives. Having learned that summer reading required by some AP courses can intimidate students, the PUSH team is implementing an online system to help support students over the summer so they don't get discouraged. An AP summer camp is offered in late July for students who are taking an AP course for the first time.

People Like Me

The Pushing Underrepresented Students Higher program was created during the summer, and by the following fall, its effect was evident. Having attended a personalized session on AP night, underserved students and their parents were encouraged by the idea that they wouldn't be the only ones who look like them in their AP class. This affirmation helped demystify the AP Program for the families. Implementing initiatives like AP summer camp and reading support online boosted the students' confidence and prevented them from dropping an AP course before it even began.



"We are a diverse school, and it is our goal to see that diversity across all of our classrooms. All of our students are encouraged to sign up for AP classes, so when they don't, the challenge becomes getting past whatever barrier that is stopping them."

— Lenora Patterson, Curriculum Assistant Principal

What you need:

- A dedicated team (Riverwood's PUSH team consists of six people: an administrator/team leader, teachers and counselors).
- An AP night scheduled for late January to encourage students to consider AP for the next school year.
- A food and drink budget to encourage AP night attendance.

What you need to know:

Even when underserved students are given the choice, even encouraged to take AP, they don't. Figuring out what it takes to get these students over the hump is a continual challenge. Riverwood would like to expand parent participation and is looking for funding to cover the costs of incentives, such as dinners or special speakers.

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Demographics

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