

Whither AP--Now? Outline:

1. What are AP's
 1. Strengths?
 2. Weaknesses?
2. How can we best reach...
 1. The most well prepared?
 2. The less well prepared?
3. A proposed new program to prepare students for college.

What are AP's Strengths? Weaknesses?

- Strengths?
“It’s standardized.” AP brings the first successful national curriculum to the United States.
- Weaknesses?
“It’s standardized.” The curriculum does not meet the needs of the diverse groups the program is trying to reach. For example,

Students losing full advantage of advanced placement

In the 1995-96 school year, 29 students attended an advanced placement American history class at Andrew Jackson High School and took a final exam to qualify for college credits.

No one passed.

Author: Thomas B. Pfankuch, Jacksonville, FL Times-Union

Publish Date: June 23, 1997

What was the response of the College Board to this warning sign of total failure in a school?

EDUCATION WEEK

Published: April 12, 2000

College Board Launches Drive for AP Availability

The College Board has announced a plan to make at least 10 Advanced Placement courses available in every high school in the country over the next decade. The initiative is intended to improve access for minority students, who are more likely to attend high schools that offer few, if any, advanced courses.

A surge of new exams in schools that had not succeeded in AP

AP surged into schools with high minority and poverty enrollments, typically with low (P)SAT or ACT scores, high dropout rates, and expectation of the need for remedial courses upon arrival at college.

All these indices, especially College Board's research, did not augur well for success of AP in these schools. Yet, despite warnings (W.L., 2000) the Board surged ahead with an emphasis on minorities:

For examples of the College Board's promotional materials aimed at minorities, see "Get with the Program"

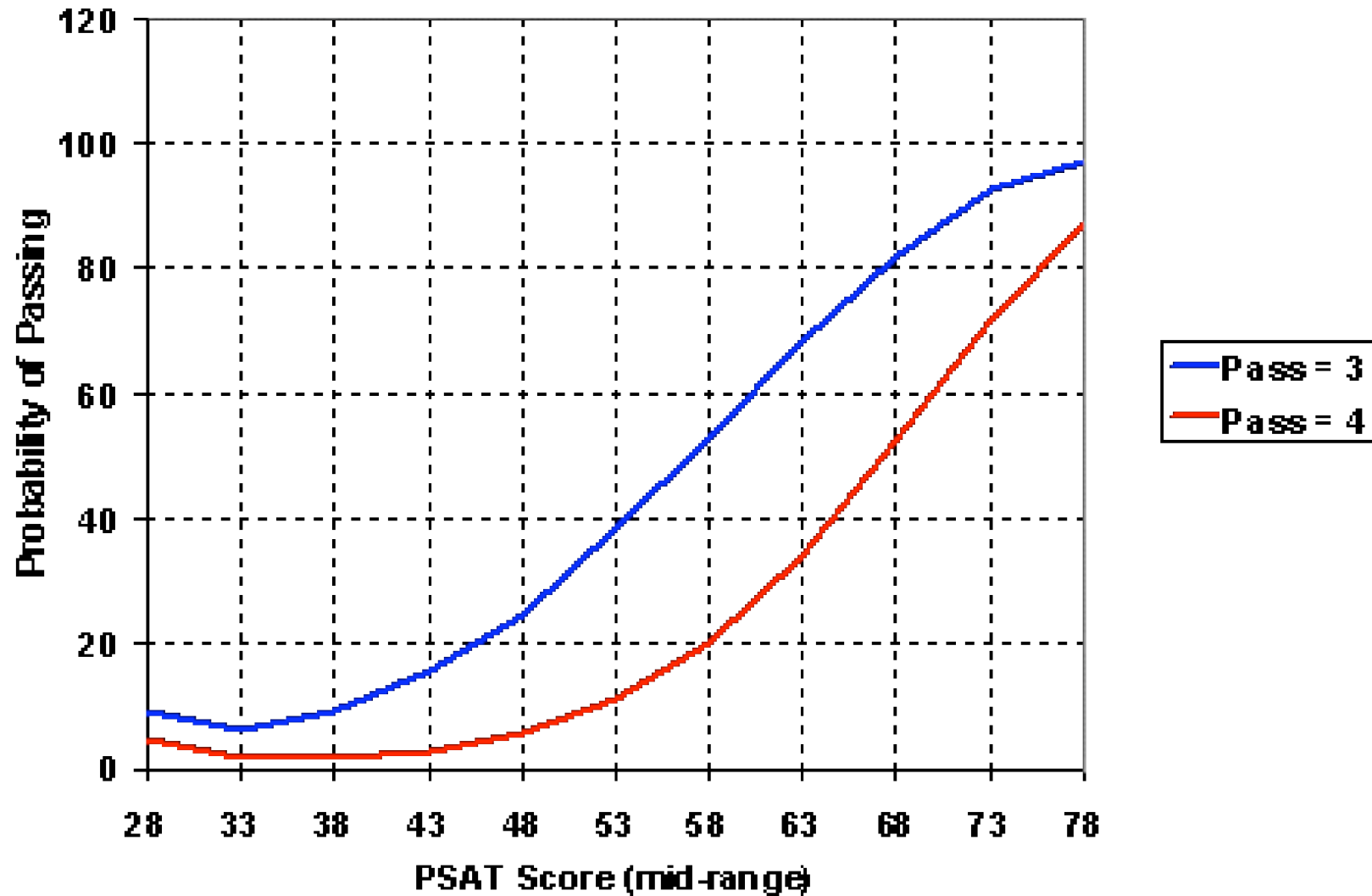
http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/public/repository/apminoritybroeng2_10396.pdf and the next slide

“AP isn’t just for top students or those headed for college. AP offers something for everyone.”

“AP teachers are very open-minded. We had students from different backgrounds, and people learn at different rates. The teachers took everybody’s views seriously. No answers were wrong if people had an opinion about something.”

—Kaween Menard: AP English Language, AP English Literature
Florin High School, Sacramento, California

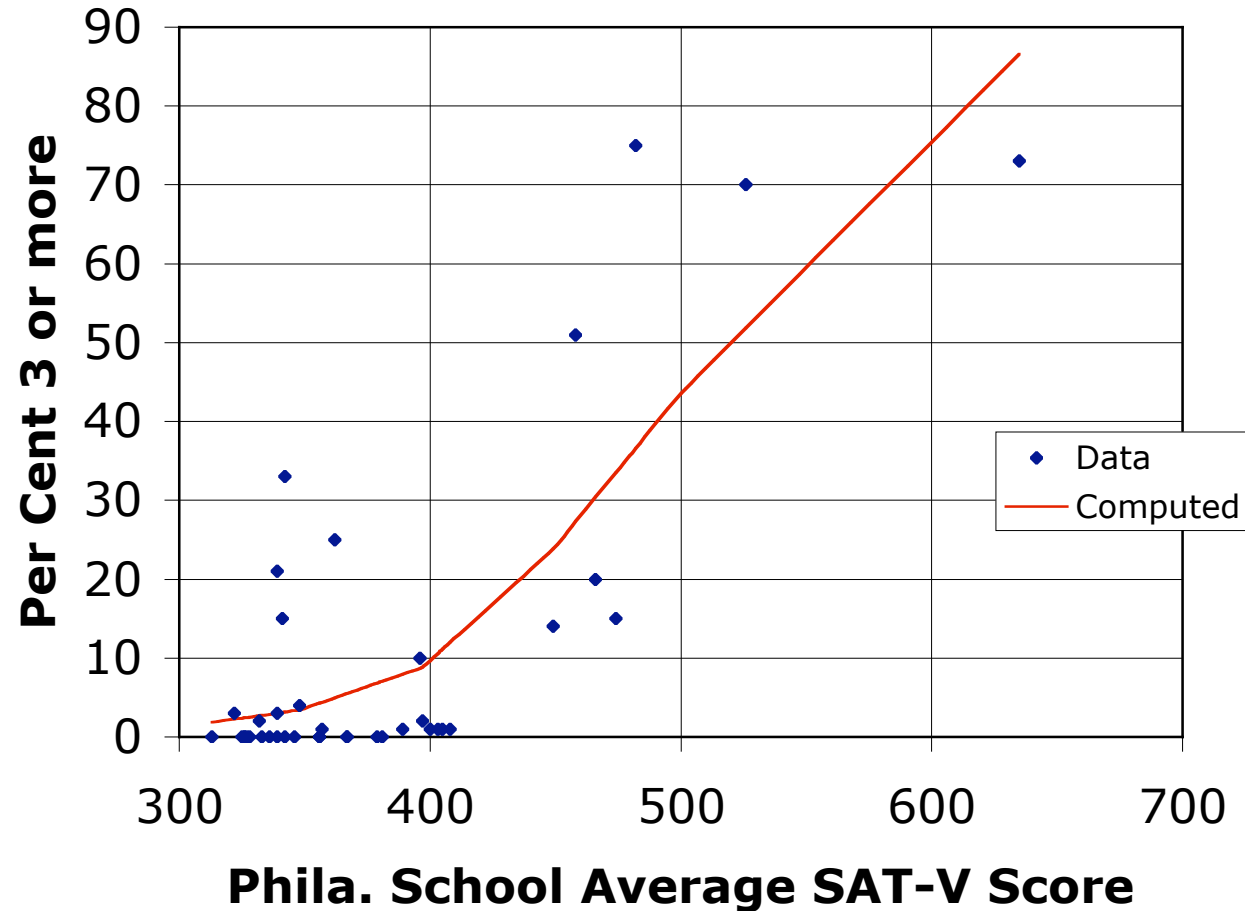
AP Calculus AB. Probability of Passing depends on PSAT score.



AP in Philadelphia. A case study

Source: Phila Inquirer, Sunday, March 25, 2007

Each point = one or more high schools.



AP Exam Performance in Phila. High Schools

A few schools do as well as the rest of the Nation (Central, Girls', Masterman, etc.) These schools have a long tradition of academic excellence, selective admission and have SAT test scores that are average or higher.

The rest of the schools have low SAT scores and do poorly on the AP exams. Most of these schools do not have even a single AP exam score that qualifies, even by the College Board's lenient standards (3 or higher). With few exceptions, these schools did not have an AP program until the College Board instituted its AP surge in 2000. For these schools, the surge was nearly a total failure.

What should be done about the failing schools that were not helped by the AP surge?

More AP courses?

Not likely. Experience has shown AP is presently not the answer for these schools.

Then what?

We look elsewhere for advice:

"...any subject can be taught effectively
in some intellectually honest form to
any child at any stage of development.

Jerome Bruner

"...any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development....

...experience has shown that it is worth the effort to provide the growing child with problems that tempt him into the next stages of development”

....But it is futile to attempt this by presenting formal explanations based on a logic that is distant from the child's manner of thinking and sterile in its implications for him."

Bruner: "The Process of Education"

"One cannot succeed at something totally beyond one's experience, beyond one's grasp. One is interested in that at which one succeeds. Thus a clever teacher sets a student's work, and the expectations for it, at a level where some modicum of legitimate success is possible." Theo. Sizer, "Horace's Compromise"

"However, because 'experience has shown that it is worth the effort to provide the growing child with problems that tempt him into the next stages of development' (Bruner), an effective teacher keeps the subject of study at an arm's length from the student, but no further."

Effective teachers in well performing, high poverty schools understand this principle and use it on a daily basis (From Carter, "No Excuses.") :

"There's no point trying to teach a child if you are above him or below him." Tom Williams

"The easiest way to maintain order in a school is to teach to everyone's appropriate instructional level." Thaddeus Lott

What should be the level for teaching an inner city student?

Compare

College reading level : 12.9 grade

Phila. high school senior 6 grade

The test score gap between these two figures explains the failure of the College Boards' AP surge. To serve inner city children who can't make it into selective magnet schools, a more effective program is desirable.

What should be a successful program for college preparation?

Remember: a majority of inner city high school graduates now go on to college. AP for inner city put the cart of college level courses before the horse of college preparation. To put the horse before the cart, start as early as the 7th grade, and prepare graduating pupils for college. If and when that goal were reached, would it be realistic to consider advanced placement. The motto should be, "college preparation, not college imitation."

Summary and Conclusions

What's good about AP? "It's standardized."
AP is a successful national curriculum.

What's bad about AP? "It's standardized."
AP has failed to reach the diverse groups at both top and bottom test scores. The failure is total for students in non-selective urban high schools, the majority in the great cities. The author proposes a new AP program to address the needs of college bound students with below average test scores.