

## 2001 Advanced Placement Report Baltimore City

The Advanced Placement (AP) Program, operated by The College Board, is a nationally-recognized series of rigorous courses with examinations administered by the Educational Testing Service. Currently The College Board offers 34 college-level courses for high school students in 19 subject areas ranging from Economics and English to Computer Science and Calculus (Appendix I). AP coursework is generally offered in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades of high school. At the conclusion of the coursework, students may elect to take the AP examination, although students are eligible to take the exam without participating in the related AP coursework. A student who successfully completes the exam (scoring three or more of a possible five points) may qualify for, at an individual college's discretion, credit and/or placement out of relevant introductory courses.

The availability of AP courses and exams in a particular school system has become one demonstration of the level of commitment to high academic standards and college attendance. In the media, both *Newsweek* and *U.S. News & World Report* used AP courses as a criterion in their recent determinations of top US High Schools. AP exams are generally considered by college admissions staff to be one indicator of a student's potential success at the post-secondary level. Furthermore, Adelman (1999) posits that a challenging high school curriculum (particularly in mathematics) versus grades or high test scores is the best predictor of college completion, particularly for minority students.<sup>1</sup> A student will profit more in the long run by taking a rigorous high school course and not passing the AP test than by settling for undemanding coursework. Although Advanced Placement is not the only rigorous course option, it is certainly one with the greatest participation and national recognition.

Accordingly, AP coursework is offered in approximately 60% of US high schools with a growing demand across the country. Typically 65% of students nationally who take an AP exam receive a score of 3 or higher. With reasonable funding commitments for teacher training and resources, any high school in the US can offer AP coursework; exam fees in high poverty areas are often subsidized.

The issue of access to advanced high school coursework received national prominence in July 1999 with the American Civil Liberties Union lawsuit against the State of California. Charging the State with providing unequal access to Advanced Placement courses in its public high schools, the ACLU's efforts led to a state-wide Advanced Placement initiative. In its first year, California's Advanced Placement Challenge Grant Program awarded \$17 million to high schools with 3 or fewer AP courses and a majority free/reduced lunch populations. The suit alone has

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<sup>1</sup> Adleman, Clifford. "Answers in the Toolbox: Academic Intensity, Attendance Patterns, and Bachelor's Degree Attainment." U.S. Department of Education. 1999.

already positively impacted the number of California schools that offer AP courses as well as placed other urban districts on notice.

**AP Participation in Baltimore City Public Schools**

Access remains an obstacle in Baltimore City: although two new high schools initiated an AP course in 2001, only 7 of Baltimore’s 19 high schools currently offer students the opportunity to enroll in AP courses. There are 12 high schools with no AP courses whatsoever. Overall, Baltimore City offers an average of only 1.6 AP courses per high school - dramatically below the national mean of five+ courses per school. Ironically, the Los Angeles high school named as deficient in the ACLU suit offered at the time more AP courses than all but four of Baltimore City’s high schools.

Nonetheless, the Baltimore City Public School System has begun to respond to the growing evidence that rigorous high school coursework, as characterized by AP curricula, is critical to longer-term student success. **Promising is the five-year trend indicating a 41% increase in the number of Baltimore City students participating in AP courses with a similar increase in the number of exams taken.** On average, an AP student in Baltimore City takes 1.4 AP courses, a statistic that has remained stable over time. In addition, AP courses are now offered in three additional high schools, two of them zoned schools with open admission policies. In this time period, City College has also introduced the International Baccalaureate program with over 100 students participating in this rigorous diploma program. There has also been limited piloting of the College Board’s rigorous “Pacesetter” high school courses in Calculus, Spanish, and English in City schools.

**AP in Baltimore City Public Schools  
1997-2001**

High Schools offering at least 1 AP course	# of Students		# of Exams		% of students with score of 3+		# AP courses offered	
	96-97	00-01	96-97	00-01	96-97	00-01	96-97	00-01
1. Baltimore City College	60	23*	77	29	48.1	27.6	5	6
2. Baltimore Polytechnic Inst.	40	65	70	116	51.4	43.1	4	6
3. Western High	53	101	62	128	22.6	32.8	5	9
4. Baltimore School for the Arts	16	19	21	25	90.5	100	5	5
5. Dunbar High	0	19	0	19	N.A.	0	0	1
6. Patterson High	0	11	0	11	N.A.	9.1	0	2
7. Southwestern	0	1	0	1	N.A.	100	0	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>329</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>% of 11/12<sup>th</sup> grade population</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>2.2</b>						

*\*In 1998, Baltimore City College initiated the International Baccalaureate program, a highly regarded upper-level high school academic program with its own series of exams.*

Despite this growth, AP participation in Baltimore City is extremely limited when viewed on a national scale. In 2001, less than 2% of Baltimore City’s 11th and 12<sup>th</sup> grade population participated in an AP course. By comparison, 2,027 students in Baltimore County (nearly 15% of the comparable population) participated in AP courses offered in every one of the county’s 23

schools. More relevant perhaps is the comparison with public schools in Washington, D.C. where three times as many students took AP exams, despite the smaller student population. As of 2001-2002, AP courses are offered in *every* District of Columbia public high school. According to a study by The Council of Great City Schools and The College Board, the top 58 urban school districts posted a mean of 657 AP exams per school district in 1999 for the 12 most widely-subscribed AP courses.<sup>2</sup> That year, only 194 AP exams were taken in those same courses in Baltimore City Public Schools.

**AP Five Year Regional Comparison  
Baltimore City/Washington, D.C./Baltimore County Public Schools  
1997-2001**

<b>Public Schools</b>	<b>Baltimore City</b>		<b>Washington, DC</b>		<b>Baltimore County</b>	
	<b>2000-2001</b>	<b>5 year change</b>	<b>2000-2001</b>	<b>5 year change</b>	<b>2000-2001</b>	<b>5 year change</b>
Number of AP Exams Taken	328	+43%	1348	+79%	3625	+75%
Number of AP Candidates	239	+41%	757	+47%	2027	+62%
Number of high schools offering at least one AP course	7 of 19	+ 3 schools	16 of 17	N.A.	23 of 23	----
% of students with AP scores of 3 or higher	38.6%	-16%	43%*	-4%*	71%	+3%
% of 11 <sup>th</sup> /12 <sup>th</sup> . high school population taking an AP course	2%	Increase from 1.8%	13%	Increase	15%	Increase
District Free/Reduced lunch rate for high school students	46.9%		68.7%		15.5%	

\*2000 results; 2001 not released

Baltimore City’s growth in number of AP candidates, while strong, is substantially less than other regional counterparts. Furthermore, as shown below, Baltimore’s percentage of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade AP participants is dwarfed by more aggressive urban areas. In the past decade both the Texas legislature and local foundations have provided critical support to increase access to AP coursework.

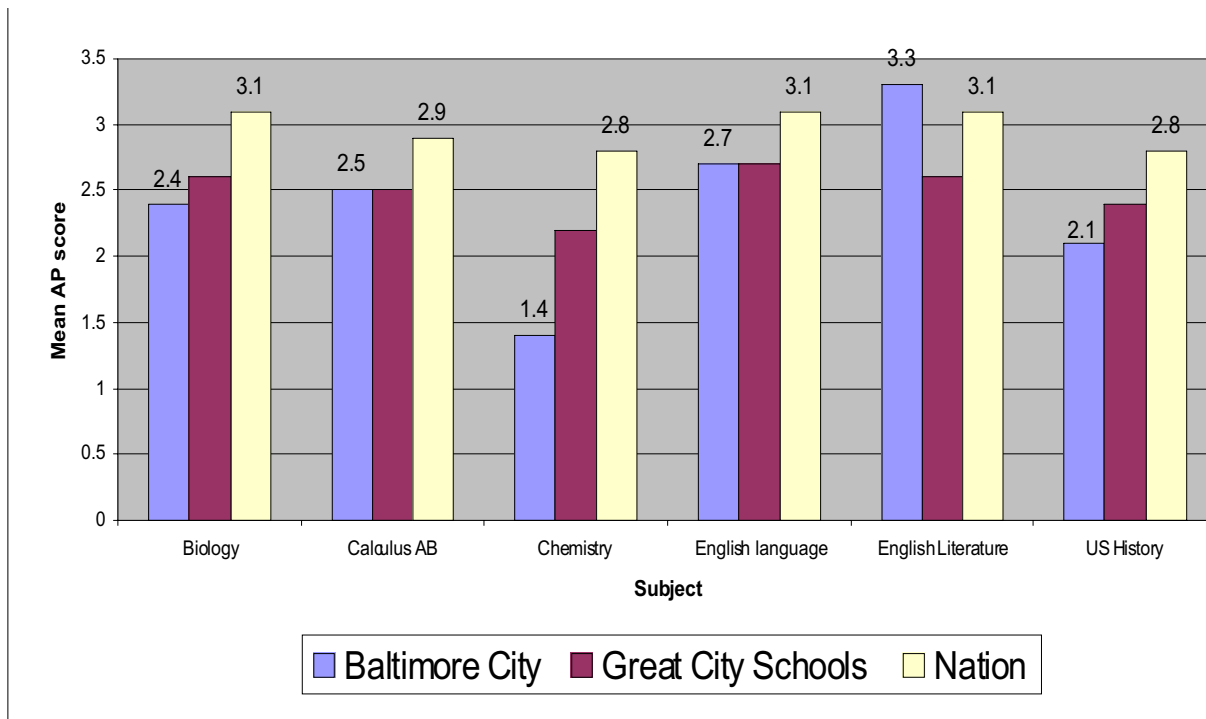
**AP Urban District Comparison  
Baltimore City/Washington, D.C. /Dallas/Houston  
2001**

<b>Public Schools</b>	<b>Baltimore City</b>	<b>Houston</b>	<b>Washington D.C.</b>	<b>Dallas</b>
	<b>2000-2001</b>	<b>2000-2001</b>	<b>2000-2001</b>	<b>2000-2001</b>
Number of AP Exams Taken	328	3,390	1,348	4,062
Number of AP Candidates	239	1,651	757	2,006
% of students with AP scores of 3 or higher	38.6%	62.3%	43%*	32.6%
<b>% of 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> grade high school population taking an AP course</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>17%</b>

\*2000 results; 2001 not released

Baltimore City’s growth in participation is less significant when viewed in the context of these other jurisdictions.

<sup>2</sup> “*Advancing Excellence in Urban Schools – A Report on Advanced Placement Examinations in the Great City Schools*”. Council of the Great City Schools and The College Board. March 2001.



The Council of Great City Schools represents the 58 largest urban school districts in the US.

### **Performance on AP Exams**

As might be expected, the increase in students participating in AP in Baltimore City has been accompanied by a decrease in level of performance on AP exams. In 1997, 46% of Baltimore City students received a score of 3 or higher while this has dropped to 39% in 2001. If increasing participation in AP is the highest priority for City schools, this decrease should not be considered particularly daunting in the short term. The large failure rate, particularly for schools new to AP should, however, be addressed.

Baltimore’s AP performance may be given more perspective by considering the performance of 58 of the largest urban districts. According to the “Advancing Excellence in Urban Schools” report, these districts performed consistently below the nation as a whole on AP exams in 1999. As seen below, Baltimore City posts AP scores either below or equal to the Great City Schools urban districts (although Baltimore exceeded even national mean scores in English Literature).

### **AP Course Offerings in Baltimore City**

Another important issue is the limited range of AP courses offered: only nine of the 34 AP courses available were offered at even one of Baltimore City’s high schools. This past year, Baltimore City posted its highest multi-school scores in English Language and Composition, Calculus AB, and Biology. In recent years, Baltimore City students have also scored well in English Literature & Composition as well.

### **Baltimore City Public Schools**

*(listed by number of participants)*

AP course	Schools offering	# exams	% scoring 3 or higher
English Literature & Composition	Western	22	36
	Dunbar	19	0
	City College	14	29
	<b>School for the Arts</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>100</b>
	Total	66	35%

Biology	<b>Poly Western City College</b>	<b>40 4 1</b>	<b>50 75 0</b>
		Total 45	51%
Chemistry	Poly Western	30 <u>10</u>	10 <u>30</u>
		Total 40	15%
English Language & Composition	<b>Poly Western City</b>	<b>19 9 5</b>	<b>100 33 0</b>
		Total 33	67%
Calculus AB	Western Patterson <b>Poly City</b> School for the Arts	13 7 <b>6 4</b> <u>1</u>	39 14 <b>100 75</b> <u>100</u>
		Total 31	52%
US History	Western City Poly Patterson	23 4 1 <u>4</u>	35 25 100 <u>0</u>
		Total 32	31%
Calculus BC	Poly	20	5%
Spanish Language	Western City	14 <u>1</u>	43 <u>0</u>
		Total 15	40%
Government US	Western	18	22%
Art History	<b>School for the Arts</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100%</b>
French Language	School for the Arts	3	100%
Music Theory	School for the Arts	3	100%
Environmental Science	Southwestern	1	100%

Schools in bold represent those with 4 or more students and pass rates 50% or higher

With a majority of the AP courses, there is one high school, and presumably one high school teacher, with a solid record for successfully preparing AP candidates. Baltimore City administrators would be wise to seek out its AP teachers with high pass rates for mentoring other AP teachers throughout the system.

### **How Baltimore's Citywide High Schools Fare**

Among Baltimore's Citywide high schools, AP participation has increased at four of five schools in the last five years: Baltimore Polytechnic Institute, Baltimore School for the Arts, Paul Laurence Dunbar High School and Western High Schools. As mentioned earlier, Baltimore City College has fewer AP participants due to the introduction of the rigorous International Baccalaureate Diploma program. As these schools with their selective admissions processes set the standard for advanced course offerings district-wide, one would hope to see a full complement of AP courses. The average of 5+ AP courses in these "premier" schools corresponds to only the national average of AP courses per school. In some ways, this limited number of AP courses in the top academic high schools could potentially lower the ceiling for all Baltimore City schools.

<i>School</i>	<b># of AP subject exams offered</b>		<b>% scoring 3 or higher</b>	
	<i>1997</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>2001</i>
<b>Baltimore City College</b>	5	6	48.1	27.6
<b>Baltimore Polytechnic Institute</b>	4	6	51.4	43.1
<b>Baltimore School for the Arts</b>	5	5	90.5	100.0
<b>Paul L. Dunbar</b>	0	1	N.A.	0
<b>Western</b>	<u>6</u>	<u>9</u>	22.6	32.8
<b>TOTAL</b>	20	27		

A total of seven new course offerings have been added to these schools since 1997, and the corresponding number of participants has increased from 169 to 208 students. The percentage of students scoring 3 or better, however, relates a mixed story: at two of the more prestigious schools, Poly and City, the passing rate has declined (by more than 16% at Poly and 41% at City) since 1997. Conversely, Western High School has managed to both double its participants and increase its passing score by 45% in that time frame. Baltimore School for the Arts, despite limited enrollment and specialized art/music focus, holds the distinction of 100% of AP exams taken at the school scored 3 or higher. Finally, Paul L. Dunbar offered its first AP course ever in 2001 albeit with disappointing passing rates.

## CONCLUSIONS

Since 1997, the number of Baltimore City students participating in AP courses has nearly doubled while the overall population of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students has increased by 15%. Furthermore, AP courses have been added to three high schools in 2001, including two zoned schools. While findings indicate a value in merely completing, if not passing, these AP exams, the performance of the three new schools has been dismal: only 2 of 31 students passed with a score of 3 in 2001.

Clearly Baltimore City Public School System administrators must provide the mandate, leadership, and subsequent support for increasing the availability of advanced high school coursework. AP with its current foundation in the System and the professed support of The College Board is one place to begin this initiative.

- ◆ Insure that Baltimore’s Citywide schools are indeed leading the way with higher levels of participation and pass rates in AP work – the goal should be to double participation and AP courses offered in these schools while increasing the exam pass rates.
- ◆ Expand AP courses where Baltimore City students have experienced the highest degree of success: Calculus AB, English Language and Composition, and Biology. Consider additional AP courses that have been offered with success in other urban districts such as Physics and Computer Science.
- ◆ Recognize, reward, and draw upon the expertise of AP teachers in each course with the highest level of success, particularly to support zoned schools. i.e., the School for the Arts in the English Literature and Composition AP course.
- ◆ Continue fledgling efforts in concert with The College Board to orient middle and early high school teachers to prepare students for rigorous coursework.
- ◆ Expand the supply of rigorous coursework options beyond AP with the nationally-recognized Pacesetters high school courses and more dual enrollment college opportunities.

In comparison with other urban school districts, Baltimore's level of participation in AP courses appears paltry. Cities like Charlotte, Houston, Dallas, and many of California's urban districts have successfully embarked in the last decade upon a course to increase access of urban students to higher level academics. The College Board's Advanced Placement program, while not the only option, may be one of the most visible in communicating that a school district is serious about high expectations for all students. Given the modest, but positive trend in AP and a potential partnership with The College Board, Baltimore City Public School System is in an opportune position to expand access to rigorous high school/college coursework to every City student.