Research Notes

Summary of Evaluation Results of
Advanced Placement Program® (AP®) Vertical Teams for English

INTRODUCTION

Pre-AP™ is neither a course nor a prescribed curriculum. Pre-AP is a concept that is consistent with the College Board's commitment to the principle that all students deserve an opportunity to participate in rigorous and academically challenging courses. This principle is represented in the following purposes for Pre-AP:

- Pre-AP is a concerted effort to fulfill the College Board's mission to prepare, inspire, and connect students to college and opportunity.
- Pre-AP prepares growing numbers of students, especially those traditionally underrepresented in AP courses, for the challenges offered by the AP® Program.
- Pre-AP teaches and reinforces crucial academic skills in the greatest possible number of students, beginning in the elementary and middle school years.
- Pre-AP enables a broader segment of the student population to benefit from a rich and rigorous curriculum (The College Board, 2000).

The College Board, through teacher and professional development, provides the mechanism by which these goals are realized. The overarching goal for these professional development opportunities is to assist educators in successfully implementing Pre-AP as part of a districtwide plan to improve participation in the AP Program. The specific goals of the workshops are as follows:

- Provide sustained emphasis on promoting the essential academic skills necessary for success in the College Board's AP Program.
- Create AP Vertical Teams® of teachers within specific subject areas, committed to improving student preparation through increased teacher-to-teacher communication and vertical alignment of the curriculum.
- Provide strong administrative, parental, and community support.
- Increase academic strengths and interests of local teachers and students.
- Develop local methods to determine student progress toward AP standards.
- Develop local strategies to provide school-based support for traditionally underrepresented students pursuing AP courses (The College Board, 2000).

These goals, along with the culminating experience of the AP Examination, are consistent with the principles of high-quality teacher professional development initiatives published by the U.S. Department of Education (1996). The principles are shown in Table 1. The goals and specific activities of the workshops embrace these U.S. Department of Education principles.

The AP Vertical Teams for English emerged nationally as a program in the 1997-98 academic year (The College Board, 1997). The AP Vertical Teams for English is one aspect of the Pre-AP program whereby a team of middle and high school teachers use the AP English courses' objectives as standards to develop a progression of courses aligned across grade levels.

As indicated by the U.S. Department of Education principles, an evaluation on the impact of AP Vertical Teams on teacher effectiveness and student learning had to be undertaken. Therefore, the College Board commissioned the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) to evaluate the impact of AP Vertical

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KEYWORDS:

Advanced Placement Program® (AP®)

AP Vertical Teams®

TABLE I

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (1996) PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES

The mission of professional development is to prepare and support educators to help all students achieve high standards of learning and development.

Professional Development:

- Focuses on teachers as central to student learning yet includes all other members of the school.
- Focuses on individual, collegial, and organizational improvement.
- Respects and nurtures the intellectual and leadership capacity of teachers, principals, and others in the school community.
- Reflects best available research and practice in teaching, learning, and leadership.
- Enables teachers to develop expertise in subject content, teaching strategy, use of technology, and other essential components in teaching with high standards.
- Promotes and instills continuous inquiry and improvement in the daily life of schools.
- Is planned collaboratively by those who will participate in and facilitate that development.
- Requires substantial time and other resources.
- Is driven by a coherent long-term plan.
- Is evaluated ultimately on the basis of its impact on teacher effectiveness and student learning, and this assessment guides subsequent professional development efforts.

Teams on schools' curriculum and participation in Pre-AP and AP programs. The evaluation examined the design, implementation, and impact of AP Vertical Teams.

The systematic implementation of AP Vertical Teams occurred first in Texas during the mid-1990s. Because (a) English was the first subject to emerge with workshops and published materials and (b) these workshops were systematically conducted and supported in Texas, the workshop participants involved in that state were invited to participate in the evaluation study. Through school system visits, AP Examination data, and a series of surveys involving teachers, principals, and department heads, an evaluation of the implementation and impact of AP Vertical Teams was undertaken. This study highlights the findings of these evaluation efforts and is organized in terms of the design, implementation, and impact of AP Vertical Teams. Although the participant sampling was not random, there is strong evidence that the goals of AP Vertical Teams were partially realized with positive results. If implementation issues are overcome, AP Vertical Teams have the potential to have a significant positive impact on students.

There was a 46 percent response rate across teachers, department heads, and principals, representing 88 (90 percent) of the schools that had sent attendees to AP Vertical Team workshops in Texas. Specifically, 51 percent of the 202 teachers, 43 percent of the 100 department heads, and 39 percent of the 101 principals responded.

DESIGN

One of the specific goals of the AP Vertical Teams is the formation of teams across schools within a district that includes middle school representation. It is especially important to involve school personnel from feeder schools so that articulation of the curriculum both across schools and grade levels is achieved. Even though this is a difficult task, teams were formed with middle school teachers in 58 percent of the schools represented in the AP Vertical Team workshops. This was based on all survey respondents (i.e., teachers, principals, and department heads) unequivocally indicating the existence of a team with middle school teachers. An additional 5 percent of schools indicated the inclusion of middle school teachers, although there was not a consensus among all of the school respondents (i.e., teacher, department head, and principal) that such representation existed.

When middle school teachers were not included in the district teams, 79 percent of the schools, nevertheless, indicated that they had an AP Vertical Team. This suggests that either the

respondents did not internalize the definition of a vertical team or they customized the definition to fit the constraints they faced in attempting to develop teams with districtwide representation.

Teams with both middle school and high school teams met less than once a year. This response varied slightly with position. The department heads and principals reported that the teams met slightly more often. However, on average, the teams involving middle school and high school teachers had a more difficult time scheduling meetings. Thus, they met almost once a year.

Teams with high school teachers reported that they met more frequently. On average, teams involving high school personnel met once per grading period. This suggests that scheduling was easier to accomplish with personnel from the same grade range because overcoming the challenges of the academic calendar was easier for them.

Initially, as prescribed in all AP Vertical Team workshops, the teams had to establish goals. As indicated in the surveys, some form of curriculum alignment was the most cited goal by teachers, department heads, and principals. Table 2 shows the goals most often developed by these teams, as indicated by teachers, department heads, and

principals. Even though curriculum alignment was shared by each group of educators as the most popular goal for the AP Vertical Teams, there were some slight differences in other popular goals among the various groups. For example, as can be seen in Table 2, teachers were looking to improve cooperation and communication among teachers; department heads seemed to be more interested in improving instruction strategies; and principals wanted to obtain more information about AP Vertical Teams.

Most respondents indicated that they were achieving the goals by meeting and aligning the curriculum. When asked how close the school was to achieving its goal, about 25 percent of teachers and principals expressed no opinion. The majority of respondents indicated that the school had at most only partially achieved its goals. Based on written comments, teachers view the AP Vertical Team as something that requires the support of administrators rather than just an initiative on the part of the teachers most directly involved. Table 3 shows the means by which the goals were being achieved by teacher, department head, and principal respondents.

TABLE 2 THE MOST COMMON GOALS OF AP VERTICAL TEAMS® FOR ENGLISH BY POSITION			
Response themes	**Teachers**	**Department Heads**	**Principals**
Curriculum alignment issues	29 of 77 (38%)	22 of 40 (55%)	15 of 32 (47%)
Increasing numbers enrolling, taking, and passing AP® Exam	20 of 77 (26%)	8 of 40 (20%)	5 of 32 (16%)
Building "capacity"—improved cooperation and communication among teachers through an effective team	19 of 77 (25%)	—	—
Long-term student benefit	7 of 77 (9%)	—	2 of 32 (6%)
Improving instructional strategies	—	9 of 40 (23%)	5 of 32 (16%)
Obtaining general information about AP Vertical Teams for English	—	8 of 40 (20%)	7 of 32 (22%)

Note: There were 102 teacher, 43 department head, and 40 principal surveys returned. These responses represented 90 percent of the schools that had attendees in AP Vertical Team workshops in Texas.

TABLE 3 THE MEANS BY WHICH THE AP VERTICAL TEAMS FOR ENGLISH ACHIEVED THEIR GOALS BY POSITION			
Means of Achieving Goals	**Teachers**	**Department Heads**	**Principals**
Meeting (formally and informally)	28 of 78 (36%)	22 of 39 (56%)	17 of 28 (61%)
Curriculum alignment	21 of 78 (27%)	12 of 39 (31%)	8 of 28 (29%)
Implementing teaching strategies	—	14 of 39 (36%)	5 of 28 (18%)
Recruiting, preparing, retaining students in Pre-AP™/AP	10 of 78 (13%)	—	—
Support issues	8 of 78 (10%)	—	—
Training/continuing education	6 of 78 (8%)	—	2 of 28 (7%)
Nothing/don't know/stagnating/regressing	22 of 78 (28%)	2 of 39 (5%)	2 of 28 (7%)

Note: There were 102 teacher, 43 department head, and 40 principal surveys returned. These responses represented 90 percent of the schools that had attendees in AP Vertical Team workshops in Texas.

IMPLEMENTATION

Based on the above goals and approaches for achieving them, the respondents reported that they implemented the following:

1. Curriculum alignment (55 percent of teacher respondents)
2. Assessment activities (e.g., rubrics)
3. Specific in-class techniques (as reported by principal [70 percent] and department head [69 percent] respondents), including:

- Title, Paraphrase, Connotation, Attitude, Shifts, Title, Theme (TPCASTT)
- Diction, Images, Details, Language, Sentence Structure (DIDLS)
- Study of archetypes
- Writing strategies
- Questioning strategies/Socratic method

However, even though the above goals were implemented, the majority of the respondents across position indicated that they, at best, only partially implemented the goals of the AP Vertical Team they had set. Table 4 provides the specific breakdown of the extent to which the goals were implemented by position.

TABLE 4 INDICATION OF HOW CLOSE THE SCHOOL IS TO ACHIEVING ITS AP VERTICAL TEAM FOR ENGLISH GOALS BY POSITION				
Status	**Teachers**	**Department Heads**	**Principals**	**Total**
Not Started	12 (11.8%)	—	2 (5.0%)	14 (7.7%)
Beginning to Achieve	16 (15.7%)	14 (35.0%)	8 (20.0%)	38 (20.8%)
Partially Achieved	34 (33.3%)	12 (30.0%)	15 (37.5%)	61 (33.5%)
Almost Achieved	13 (12.7%)	11 (27.5%)	5 (12.5%)	29 (15.9%)
Fully Achieved	1 (1.0%)	—	1 (2.5%)	2 (1.1%)
No Opinion	26 (25.5%)	6 (7.5%)	9 (22.5%)	41 (20.9%)
Total	102	43	40	185

Note: There were 102 teacher, 43 department head, and 40 principal surveys returned. These responses represented 90 percent of the schools that had attendees in AP Vertical Team workshops in Texas.

The type of support the teams received that permitted them to partially implement their goals included (a) time to meet, (b) teacher cooperation/buy-in, (c) additional training, (d) support, (e) outside funding (e.g., grants, incentive programs), and (f) publicity. The main factor that helped them partially implement the AP Vertical Team goals was time to meet.

Teachers reported that they were given time to meet, most commonly to complete curriculum alignment, but this time had been reduced or eliminated gradually. So even though teachers were given time to meet, they reported that they did not receive a common planning period (91 percent) or time during school to meet (84 percent). Therefore, it seems that the constraints of the school day and scheduling limited the ability of the AP Vertical Team to meet.

In addition, as seen in many schools throughout the country, the teams experienced teacher transience. Thus, teachers who were trained on AP Vertical Team goals would leave the school or be reassigned. As a result, the success of fully implementing the goals was curtailed.

Teachers were asked what it would take to fully implement the AP Vertical Team goals. Their responses were clearly related to time and support. Not only did the team members need time to meet, they needed *common* time. The support needed to fully realize these goals was district-level support. For example, teachers and department heads repeatedly listed the general need for "support" from their district administrators. Support was also defined as the need for funding to train new teachers and team members when existing teachers left.

Overall, the respondents indicated a need for consistent availability of time, money, and cross-school facilitation to fully implement the AP Vertical Team goals. Such resources, however, can only come from district initiative and support. Thus, the respondents indicated that they started the implementation with sufficient resources and support, but over time these resources waned.

Specifically, teachers needed common planning time continuously through the year. In addition, funding for follow-up training and training of new members was needed but not made available. Finally, without district involvement, the creation of teams across schools and grade levels, as recommended by AP Vertical Team guidelines, would not be realized.

IMPACT

Even though the goals of the AP Vertical Teams were only partially realized, there were some positive results of the impact of AP Vertical Teams on student exposure to Pre-AP instruction and AP courses and student performance on the AP Examinations. Although the results are only modest, they are promising. It appears that if the AP Vertical Team goals were more fully implemented, the impact is likely to be more extensive. In an effort to evaluate the impact of AP Vertical Teams, the evaluators asked teachers, department heads, and principals for their perceptions of impact and examined student participation and performance on AP English Language and AP English Literature examinations.

The following were the areas about which teachers, department heads, and principals were asked their perceptions of the impact of the AP Vertical Teams in their schools:
1. The English college-preparatory curriculum in the school
2. The English curriculum as a whole in the school
3. Students exposed to Pre-AP strategies and topics
4. Access of students to AP courses
5. Students taking AP courses
6. Student preparation for AP English classes

In addition to surveying perceptions, the participation and performance of students in AP English Literature and AP English Language examinations support the positive trends reported. Table 5 summarizes the responses of teachers, department heads, and principals to questions about the above topics. In addition, Figures 1 and 2 summarize the participation and performance of students from the schools with AP Vertical Teams. There were slight differences across position, but the following is a summary of the median responses:
- There was a more rigorous English college preparatory curriculum in the school, although department heads considered the change slightly more rigorous.
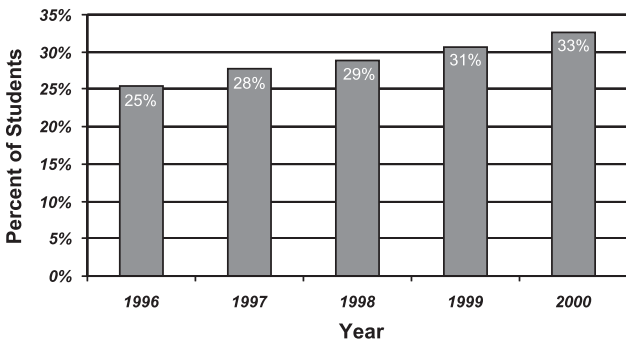
TABLE 5
SUMMARY OF PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF AP VERTICAL TEAMS
FOR ENGLISH ON VARIOUS AREAS BY POSITION

Area	Teachers	Department Heads	Principals
1. Changes in rigor of English college-preparatory curriculum in school	More rigorous	Slightly more rigorous	More rigorous
2. Changes in rigor in English curriculum as a whole in school	No change	Slightly more rigorous	More rigorous
3. Changes in the number of students taking Pre-AP courses	Slightly more	Slightly more	Slightly more
4. Changes in the number of minority students taking Pre-AP courses	No change	Slightly more	Slightly more
5. Change in the access of students to AP courses	More access	More access	More access
6. Change in the number of students taking AP courses	No change	Slightly more	Slightly more
7. Change in the number of minority students taking AP courses	No change	Slightly more	Slightly more
8. Change in how prepared students are for AP English courses	More prepared	More prepared	More prepared
9. Change in the performance of students on AP Examinations	Slightly better	Slightly better	Slightly better

Note: The summary results are the scale labels representing the median value from the seven-point Likert scale used in the survey.
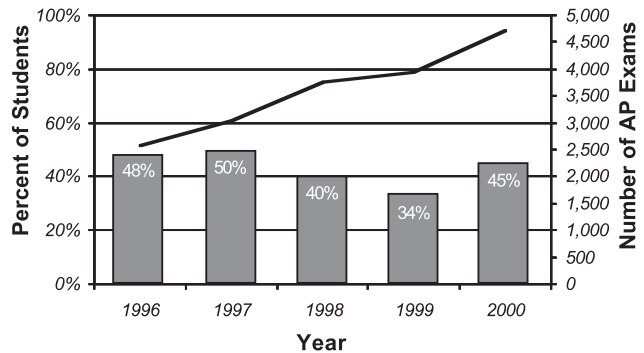
- Regarding changes in rigor in English curriculum as a whole, there were differences among teachers, department heads, and principals. Teachers reported no change; department heads reported slightly more rigor; and principals reported a more rigorous English curriculum as a whole in the school.
- There were slightly more students being exposed to Pre-AP instructional strategies and topics.

- Teachers reported no change in the number of minority students exposed to Pre-AP, whereas department heads and principals reported slightly more minority students. This difference may be due to the fact that there might be a very slight change in the number of minority students exposed to Pre-AP instruction when examined by class. But the overall department head and principal response indicated that the number might have slightly increased.
- There was more access to students taking AP courses.

Note:
1. These students represent those taking an AP English Language or AP English Literature examination who were in the schools in Texas that reported having an AP English Vertical Team.
2. The 1996 data are included for comparison purposes only because Texas schools had not yet begun to implement AP Vertical Teams.

Figure 1. Percent of African American and Hispanic Students Taking AP English Language and AP English Literature Examinations 1996–2000.

Note: These students represent students taking an AP English Language or AP English Literature examination who were in the Texas schools that reported having an AP Vertical Team for English.

Figure 2. Median Percentage of Students Scoring a 3 or Higher on AP English Language and AP English Literature Exams and Number of Exams Taken 1996–2000.

- As in the case of the Pre-AP responses, teachers reported no change in the number of minority students taking AP courses. Department heads and principals reported slightly more minority students taking AP courses. Quantitative information on AP course participation is not available. However, the number of examinations taken is available. As can be seen in Figure 1, the percent of minority students taking AP English Language and AP English Literature examinations increased slightly each year from 1996 to 2000.

- Teachers, department heads, and principals reported that students were more prepared for AP English courses, and their performance was slightly better on AP Examinations. Figure 2 indicates that even though there has been an increase in the number of AP Examinations taken in the schools with AP Vertical Teams, the percentage of students scoring a 3 or higher on AP English Language and AP English Literature exams is relatively stable with a slight increase from 1999 to 2000.

The impact of the AP Vertical Teams in this sample of schools appears to be positive, even though the goals of the AP Vertical Teams were partially implemented. The reported impact by school educators (i.e., teachers, department heads, and principals), along with the AP participation and performance data, is not overwhelming. However, because of the partial implementation of the stated goals, these are very encouraging results.

UTILIZATION OF FINDINGS

Administrators should be encouraged to provide time for AP Vertical Teams to meet. The team needs time to meet beyond the implementation stage of the AP Vertical Team. Time is needed to continue teaming efforts and to ensure that new members are brought into the team. This acculturation is a necessary component of team building because of the inevitable turnover of teaching and administrative staff. Furthermore, the time made available should be common to all team members.

Administrators should be encouraged to provide consistent funding for teacher training. AP Vertical Team members cited the importance of follow-up training to learn new teaching strategies to better meet the needs of their students. In addition, AP and Pre-AP professional development should be provided to new or potential team members.

An active acculturation program for new team members is an important aspect of an AP Vertical Team. Creating this acculturation program should be considered for inclusion into AP Vertical Team training.

The importance of a district-level AP Vertical Team advocate should be stressed at all AP administrator workshops and in AP Vertical Team workshops. This district-level supporter must be given the authority and power necessary to accomplish goals established for the AP Vertical Team. It should be stressed that part of this power and authority should include the budget necessary to allow time for AP Vertical Teams to meet and to fund teacher training.

Even though the number of minority students participating in AP classes was reported by department heads and principals to have increased slightly, there is still plenty of room for more improvement. This study further reinforces the need for recruiting minority students into the early Pre-AP classes in the middle schools. From the teachers' perspective, there were no changes in the number of minority students in Pre-AP classes. The role of Pre-AP professional development for middle school teachers is to reinforce the students' abilities to meet the challenges of courses like AP and college. If minority students do not develop these skills, the achievement gap only widens. If the implementation issues summarized above are addressed and more students are engaged in high-level learning through Pre-AP professional development, then improved performance in AP courses can be realized, even as participation expands to include all students.

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