

AP[®] QUALIFYING SCORES SOAR FOR CLAYTON COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Photo Credit: Clayton County Public Schools

SPRINGBOARD FOR SUCCESS

Before joining forces with the National Math and Science Initiative, Georgia's Clayton County Public Schools saw a decline in qualifying scores among its students' Advanced Placement[®] exams. Now, this Title I district – which has a poverty rate of 20 percent and a population of nearly 75 percent of students who identify as students of color – has seen qualifying AP[®] scores soar. District leaders credit their partnership with NMSI for the new-found and sustainable success.

When Kristie Heath, Ed.S., director of advanced learning and intervention, joined the CCPS district office in 2013, annual AP qualifying scores were typically below 10 percent of all AP exams taken. The rate of qualifying scores crept up to 15 percent in 2015 – but school leaders knew there was more potential waiting to be unleashed. “Today, we’re excited that 29.1 percent of our AP students are earning qualifying scores on their AP exams,” Ms. Heath said.

In addition to all high schools now demonstrating double-digit qualifying percentages, she said two high schools with more academically-advanced student populations are achieving tremendous qualifying scores on their AP exams:

Martha Ellen Stilwell School of the Arts qualifying scores

2018-19: 44%
2019-20: 49%
2020-21: 30%

Elite Scholars Academy qualifying scores

2018-19: 32%
2019-20: 27%
2020-21: 48%

EXPANDING INTEREST IN ADVANCED PLACEMENT

CCPS has an open-door policy for enrolling in AP courses, but that wasn't always a part of the culture across the district's 12 high schools. Building upon the district's Advanced Learning for All initiative, NMSI's College Readiness Program spurred CCPS to make increased inclusion in AP a district-wide priority and possibility.

"From the students' perspective, one of the biggest obstacles to enrolling students in AP courses, especially STEM subjects, was their concern about the workload and their ability to succeed in these classes," Regina Willingham, gifted content lead teacher explained.

Many students felt intimidated about enrolling in STEM courses, wondering whether they were academically prepared. Some students thought those who enrolled in AP were smart and confident enough to jump in and succeed without much help.

But it wasn't just student perceptions getting in the way of increased AP enrollment. Well-meaning teachers also had misplaced beliefs about what a suitable candidate for accelerated classes "looked like" in terms of their achievement, potential interest, attitude or motivation.

THE BEGINNING OF A CULTURE SHIFT

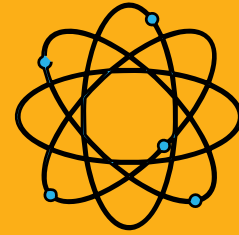
Although there were misconceptions about AP involvement among both students and teachers, CCPS administration provided overwhelming support to their schools and NMSI delivered the tools needed to jump-start a sustainable culture change.

Two key changes were constructing a success mindset for students and teachers and introducing advanced learning opportunities starting with middle school.

Today, CCPS offers accelerated math in sixth and seventh grade to prepare students to take high school courses by eighth grade. Currently, many of their

8th grade students are taking Algebra 1, high school physical science or 9th grade literature.

Although this is a structural adjustment, the most important aspect of these enriched expectations is that students develop a mindset that taking accelerated classes is the normal path forward.



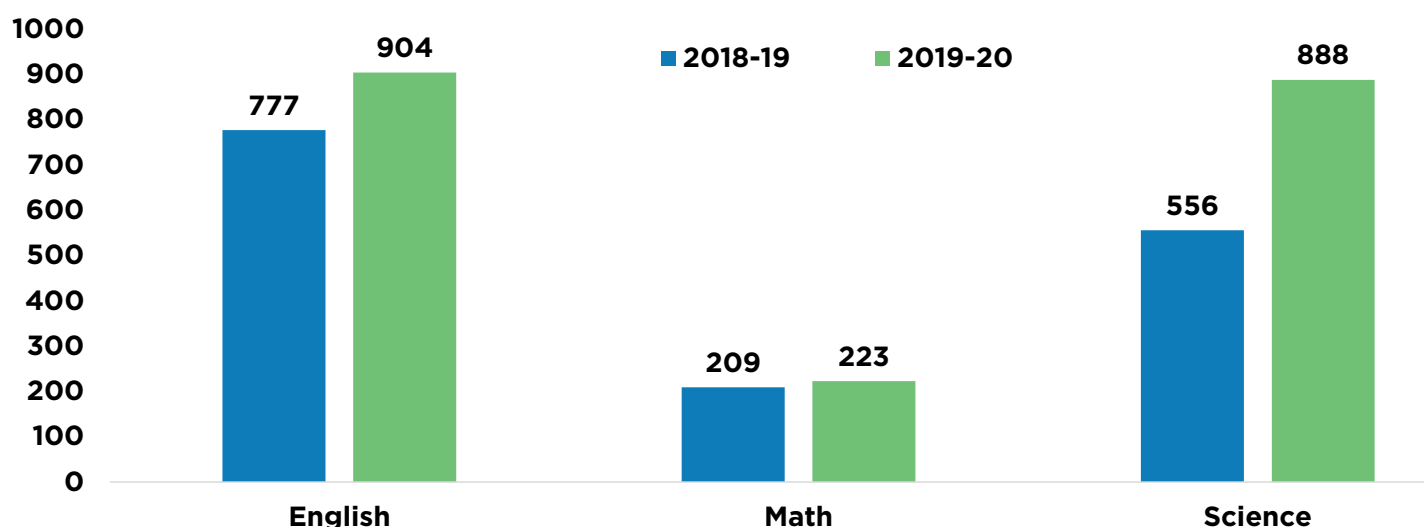
WHAT IS NMSI'S COLLEGE READINESS PROGRAM?

NMSI's CRP empowers sustainable changes at the school system, campus and classroom levels to better prepare all students for college and beyond. It includes:

- Teacher and leader support
- Student support
- Course content
- Mentorship



AP COURSE ENROLLMENT



TURNING LOSS INTO LEAPS

While parents, educators and the media talk about “learning loss” due to COVID-19, some school systems unintentionally developed a learning-loss mentality long before the pandemic. In those environments, teachers and students assumed that if students didn’t start accelerated classes early enough, then they’ve lost the opportunity to participate in accelerated learning.

That’s not the case at CCPS. They embrace a “learning leap” mindset, which empowers teachers to support a larger group of students. Here’s how Ms. Heath explains it:

“One of the big things is that some of our AP teachers felt that AP classes were somewhat exclusive. They needed to recognize that ANY student can be in an AP class. You just need to scaffold to their foundational

gaps and still teach them at the AP level. These learning leaps show respect to the students. They get excited – and you start to see changes.”

NMSI’s College Readiness Program facilitates the mindset Ms. Heath describes: As teachers become more engaged and excited about AP courses, students shift their mindset about advanced courses, especially when it comes to sitting for the year-end AP exams. Even some of their 9th graders are choosing to take the exams, with 27 percent of exams taken earning qualifying scores during the 2019-2020 school year.

In addition, some Dual Enrolled students are now sitting for AP exams, demonstrating that Dual Enrollment and AP classes can be complementary instead of mutually exclusive.

RELATIONSHIPS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

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“In addition to content coaches, each teacher had a mentor they communicated with and who supported them throughout the school year. These relationships were so important to our teachers!”

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Regina Willingham

Gifted, Advanced Learning, EIP & REP Lead Teacher

A BRIGHT FUTURE

Nowadays, there is an expectation that AP matters. “NMSI provided us with a really great structure to show us how to not only support our teachers and county, but especially our students,” Ms. Heath said.

Ms. Willingham echoes that message, “We’ve taken the best practices that we learned from NMSI and are continuing to implement them in our school. They gave us a roadmap that shows sustainable success is possible.”



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