

Joint Announcement Regarding Advanced Placement Courses

Today, eight Washington-area independent schools – Georgetown Day, Holton-Arms, Landon, Maret, National Cathedral, Potomac, St. Albans, and Sidwell Friends – announce our shared commitment to eliminate Advanced Placement courses from our curricula by 2022. As the heads of these schools, we have been meeting regularly over the past several years to discuss educational research and compare experience. One topic on which we all agree is the diminished utility of AP courses and the desirability of developing our own advanced courses that more effectively address our students' needs and interests.

Collectively, we believe a curriculum oriented toward collaborative, experiential, and interdisciplinary learning will not only better prepare our students for college and their professional futures, but also result in more engaging programs for both students and faculty. We expect this approach will appeal to students' innate curiosity, increase their motivation, and fuel their love of learning.

When introduced in the early 1950s, the AP program was intended to offer particularly ambitious students an opportunity to pursue and receive credit for college-level work, allowing them to graduate from college early. Yet today, few college students graduate in less than four years. Further, each college has its own policy as to how, or if, credit is awarded for AP tests, with some top schools no longer offering any credit at all. Nevertheless, many of our students feel compelled to take AP courses in the mistaken belief that failing to do so may hurt their college prospects.

In truth, with nearly 40% of high school students now taking these courses, the AP designation has become less noteworthy to college admissions officers. Our own survey of almost 150 colleges and universities confirms this. We have been assured by admissions officers that this change will have no adverse impact on our students. The real question for colleges is not whether applicants have taken AP courses, but whether they have availed themselves of their high schools' most demanding classes.

The perception that colleges demand AP courses leads many students, perhaps reluctantly, to pass up other classes they might find more intellectually transformative and rewarding. Concurrently, because AP tests loom so large, faculty teaching these courses often feel pressed to sacrifice in-depth inquiry in order to cover all the material likely to be included on the test. This runs counter to the fact that college courses demand critical thinking and rigorous analysis. AP courses, by contrast, often stress speed of assimilation and memorization. While we acknowledge the recent attempts to develop more skill-based AP tests, we are convinced that focusing on a timed standardized test does not promote inquiry or higher-level discussion among students. Moving away from AP courses will allow us to offer a wider variety of courses that are more rigorous and enriching, provide opportunities for authentic engagement with the world, and demonstrate respect for students' intellectual curiosity and interests.

Finally, we have the benefit of the experience of the many other excellent and well-known boarding and day schools across the country that already have transitioned away from AP courses over the past decade. These schools report positive results, with no negative impact on college placement. Our aim in making this announcement jointly and publicly is to lend our collective voice to this important educational movement and help pave the way for other schools considering a similar change. We hope you will be as enthusiastic as we are about this important milestone.