

How AP Seminar Delivers College- and Career-Ready Skills

Developing teamwork and collaboration skills has become increasingly important for the professional workplace. At Rockford Public Schools in Michigan, we've found that AP® Seminar is a powerful tool for helping students develop these crucial abilities and effectively interact with their peers. Often, they must learn to work with individuals who may not share their same work ethic and approach, much like today's professional environment. They also need to understand how to take ownership of their contributions and responsibilities. AP Seminar has provided a valuable vehicle for addressing this while achieving many of our district's goals.

IDENTIFYING THE OPPORTUNITY

Our community of 6,000 residents, located about 10 miles north of Grand Rapids, Mich., features a single traditional high school educating approximately 1,700 students in grades 10–12.

Our district's strategic plan, the Rockford Action Model for Success or RAMS XII, informs our pillars and priorities. That plan specifically articulates a commitment to a guaranteed and viable curriculum delivering high-quality learning that supports student engagement. The plan also seeks to ensure that disadvantaged or underperforming students have access to coursework that helps close achievement gaps.

RAMS XII also outlines a commitment to college and career readiness, building employability skills that support success such as leadership, taking initiative, social interaction, and problem-solving.

TURNING OPPORTUNITY INTO ACTION

In 2022-23, our superintendent, Dr. Steve Matthews, initiated efforts to introduce more Advanced Placement® opportunities because he believed all students are capable of learning at higher levels.

As a matter of district policy, AP Seminar replaced English 10 in the 2023-24 school year and has become a requirement for all sophomores. In the 2024-25 school year, we have 100% participation in AP Seminar, and the district covers the AP Exam costs.

Our ninth graders, who attend a separate Freshman Center, come into the course having taken Pre-AP® English 1. The course has provided an excellent foundation for building the readiness skills for success in English 10: AP Seminar, such as reading, evidence-based writing, and argument analysis.

When we implemented the AP Seminar requirement, our teachers faced a steep learning curve at first. But they found working together as a team, much like our students would be expected to do in the course, enabled them to align with one another and create a harmonized learning experience for all students. Our previous English 10 course had a heavy literature focus. So, they had to adapt to the writing-intensive, inquiry-based nature of AP Seminar.



DISTRICT

Rockford Public Schools

LOCATION

Rockford, MI

DEMOGRAPHICS

7,719

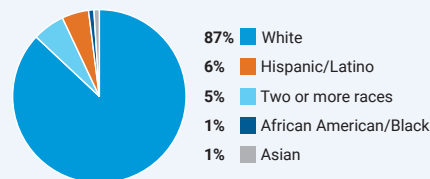
Total district enrollment

2,467

Grades 9–12 enrollment

16%

Low income



AP PROGRAM

1,484

Total enrollments in AP classes

1,058

Individual student enrollments in AP classes

28

Number of AP courses offered

43%

Grades 9–12 students enrolled in AP classes

552

English 10: AP Seminar enrollment

94%

First-time AP students enrolled in English 10: AP Seminar

EVALUATING THE OUTCOMES

We're pleased to be able to offer Advanced Placement earlier in our students' high school journey. English 10: AP Seminar is the first AP class for 94% of our sophomores this year. As a result, we've observed notable improvements in student writing and reading across all subjects. Additionally, students have shown significant growth in their collaboration and communication skills.

In 2023-24—our first year requiring AP Seminar as the grade 10 English credit—64.2% of our sophomores earned a 3 or higher on the AP Seminar Exam. The expository reading and writing in PSAT™ 10 also inched up, going from 82% to 83% proficiency. We've also seen an uptick in AP Language and Composition enrollment, which gives these students an additional opportunity to earn college credit.

We have advice for districts preparing for the course's rollout, especially those that are large scale. We found that sending our teachers to AP Summer Institutes together as a cohort proved extremely valuable.

After our first year, we hired an instructional coach who had taught AP Seminar previously. The coach mentors newer AP Seminar teachers, helping them with teaching and instructional planning.

Students tell us they clearly see the benefits of this initiative, and two shared their experience about AP Seminar:

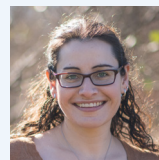
"Taking AP Seminar last year helped me learn to be a more sophisticated writer and find credible research. It also pushed me to take more AP classes and put myself out there."

"I focused on learning how to become an academic writer rather than a student who just goes through the motions. This class has helped me in a few ways outside of school."

PRACTICAL POINTERS

- **Leverage AP Classroom Resources:** Each year, all AP Seminar teachers must take and pass the Team Multimedia Presentation and Individual Multimedia Presentation certification tests to submit scores for those performance task components. Take advantage of these "online scoring trainings" as soon as they become available in AP Classroom.
- **Deploy a Peer Mentoring Program:** Our most successful students become AP Seminar writing mentors in their junior year. These students earn elective credit for mentoring current AP Seminar students with their writing and presentation skills. Never doubt the power of students in persuading their peers to rise to the challenge.
- **Implement Team Teaching or Buddies:** We found that this course is best team taught. If that's not an option, set up a system for teachers to find a buddy teacher from a neighboring school or district to plan with.

EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVES



Megan DeRuiter
ELA Instructional Coach

"It has been really positive for students to work with others who have different interests and, at times, different levels of engagement. It's not ever easy to help students navigate group dynamics or conflict, but it leads to really impactful learning experiences for students."



Lisa Avram
Teacher

"I am incredibly proud of our teachers for their dedication and collaboration in bringing this course to life. Their commitment to creating an engaging and inclusive learning experience not only inspires students' confidence but also ensures they see themselves reflected in the curriculum of such a rigorous course."



Learn more about AP courses designed for a broader range of students at cb.org/powerofap