

Kankakee School District #111

Kankakee, Illinois



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Our Reason for Tackling AP/IB Equity Work

Kankakee School District 111 has a diverse population of students: 49% African-American, 27% Hispanic and 22% White. I am a native of Kankakee and believe that the diversity within the district is a strength when considering the importance of preparing all children for a global economy. Based on our achievement data across the district as well as demographic data within our gifted, honors and AP classes, our students who are Latino and African-American have been consistently underrepresented in higher level courses. I feel strongly that Kankakee School District should not only focus on the achievement gap but also the opportunity gap that exists for many of our students.

The Most Inspiring Aspect of the Work

Kankakee School District 111 has just recently begun our work through Lead Higher. The data that supported my desire to participate in this work was the data presented by Equal Opportunity Schools during a presentation to our high school Leadership Team. This data revealed that students who took AP classes regardless of whether or not they passed the exam were more 10 – 20% likely to complete college; students who have taken an AP course and passed are 26-34% more likely to graduate from college than students who did not take an AP course.

Who Benefits Most

I feel that our students, regardless of their ethnicity or socio-economic background, will benefit significantly from the support provided through Lead Higher. All students will have the opportunity to take more rigorous courses including AP courses. I was impressed with the student profile that will be created. More importantly, whether the students take AP courses or not, the conversations that counselors and other staff members will have with students will increase awareness of college and career opportunities. The work with Lead Higher will give us common language to use with students beginning as early as elementary school.

Advice

The most important component of the work for both staff members and students is changing the mindset. We will have to work on the perception that only certain students should take AP courses. The information presented by Lead Higher demonstrates that there are variables to consider beyond test scores.

We (superintendent cabinet) believe that test scores are not the only barrier to enrollment in more rigorous courses. Adults will also need to self-reflect on personal biases and low expectations for students who are traditionally underrepresented. Kankakee School District 111 will need to confront these issues in order to increase opportunities for college readiness for all students.

