

Advanced Placement Participation, Staffing, and Staff Training in the District of Columbia Public Schools

Over the past decade the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) has sought to expand participation in Advanced Placement (AP) courses in order to improve high school outcomes (attendance, achievement, and graduation) and longer-term outcomes (postsecondary enrollment and degree completion).

DCPS wants to understand policies and recommendations that are intended to increase the number of students taking and passing AP courses and exams. These include mandating that students enroll in certain AP courses (a policy implemented in specific schools), recommending that teachers participate in the Advanced Placement Summer Institute (APSI) at least once every three years (a recommendation from DCPS in place since 2017), and recommending that AP courses are taught by a teacher whose college (undergraduate or graduate) major aligns with the course or its subject area (a recommendation under consideration by DCPS).

As a first step toward understanding the AP course enrollment policy, this study examined AP course enrollment, AP exam taking rates, and AP exam passing rates. To better understand how the APSI recommendation has been implemented, the study also examined APSI participation rates overall and by school and teacher characteristics. Finally, the study examined the share of AP teachers whose college major aligned with the AP course they taught or its broad subject area and how alignment varied by school and teacher characteristics.

Key findings

- **Three of the four DCPS high schools that adopted a mandate on AP course enrollment during the study period had higher AP exam taking and passing rates after their mandate went into place.** Passing rates were generally still low in schools mandating AP course enrollment. In three of the five schools that adopted a mandate before or during the study period, the passing rate (grade 10–12 students in the school who passed at least one AP exam as a percentage of all grade 10–12 students in the school) was below 20 percent in every year of the study period, and in a fourth it was below 50 percent in every year.
- **Fewer than one-fifth of AP teachers participated in the APSI at least once every three years.** The participation rate was higher in schools offering more AP courses, in schools with lower percentages of racial/ethnic minority students, among teachers whose college major aligned with the specific AP course they taught, and among more experienced AP teachers.
- **Among AP teachers with a college major on record, about half had a college major aligned with each AP course they taught, and 70 percent had a college major aligned with the broader subject area of each AP course they taught.** Among teachers with a college major on record, the share of teachers whose major aligned with each AP course they taught declined over the study period.