

GUEST OPINION

Advanced Placement classes can give students a head start on college

About a quarter of district students take AP classes

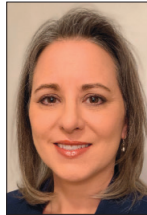
By Jen Wimmer

For some West Bend East and West High School students, final exams taken in May have more at stake than showing an understanding of one or two semesters of content. Rather, when hundreds of students take their Advanced Placement Program exams this month, it is with the intention of showing their commitment to learning college-level material and possibly earning credits toward a post-secondary degree.

The Advanced Placement Program by the College Board allows high school students to challenge themselves academically by taking college-level courses while in high school. Near the end of the school year, students have the opportunity to take an AP exam for each class to potentially receive college credits based on their score. West Bend East and West offer 24 AP classes.

Earning college credit is not the only benefit of AP classes. Our schools have observed that students learn important time management and study skills that are beneficial for college and career success. According to the College Board, students, “dig deeper into subjects that interest them and learn to tap their creativity and their problem-solving skills to address course challenges.”

Enrolling in AP classes shows college admissions officials that students are ready for a college curriculum and challenging course load. Career- or



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military-bound students can apply the attention to detail, time management, and problem-solving skills from AP classes to their chosen field.

The exams are scored on a range from 1-5. For most colleges, students can receive college credits by earning a score of three and higher. The credit is typically applicable to introductory-level college courses in the same subject as the AP class. There are some colleges that offer more than the standard three credits for a 4 or 5 score on the exam. In fact, depending on the test and the college, students can earn up to six credits for a “passed” test. Gaining credits while in high school means that a student could get ahead on first-year college requirements and also potentially graduate early or have time to add a second major or minor. In 2021, 84.5% of East and West students earned a 3 or better on their AP test(s).

Each college has different policies, so our staff assists students in assessing the AP classes they take and which colleges or universities offer the most credits if they score a 3, 4, or 5 on the exams. Counselors can even show students the potential college tuition cost savings.

To ensure we are offering our students the most impactful experience, our high schools monitor the trends and data related to the Advanced

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Placement enrollment, number of tests taken, and test scores. Interestingly, over the last six years as the high schools experienced lower enrollment, the same number of students have enrolled in one or more AP classes; between 24-26% of the combined student body. It is a testament to our students and teachers that the number of East and West students gaining a 3 or higher on the AP exam is exceptional. In most classes, the rate is higher than both the state and national rate.

AP classes offer opportunities for all students to take on a significant challenge that can result in great reward. From 2017-2021, West and East students have earned a 3 or higher on 967 AP tests, resulting in a potential 2,901-4,835 earned college credits while in high school.

We encourage students and their families to think seriously about taking advantage of AP classes, and the West Bend High Schools are proud to offer a large variety of these classes to meet the interests of our students.

(Jen Wimmer is superintendent of the West Bend School District.)