

#Admissions Insider (/admissions-insider)

Mixed Views on AP Courses

Many fear students feel pressure to take too many of them. Admissions directors say they respect other kinds of rigorous courses just as much.

By [Scott Jaschik](#) // September 24, 2018



In June, eight elite private high schools in the Washington area [announced that they were dropping out of the Advanced Placement program](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/06/19/eight-private-high-schools-washington-area-are-dropping-out-ap-program) (<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/06/19/eight-private-high-schools-washington-area-are-dropping-out-ap-program>).

The schools said that they had come to question whether AP courses were as good as advertised, even if applicants to top colleges have come to boast about the number of AP courses in which they succeed. **The schools said they believed they could create their own courses**, offering more challenge and rigor than AP. And they wanted to challenge the assumption that students need to favor AP over activities or courses that may more closely reflect their interests.

Along these lines, York has added ACP courses to their course catalog, but these may or may not be considered replacements for AP content. York may evolve toward "creating their own courses", but unless/until they do (which is a process that would take time), AP remains a valuable part of our course catalog.

Surprised many educators, especially since the more standard criticism of AP has been directed at those high schools (generally serving wealthy students) who have access to many more AP offerings than do other students.

But did the message of the high schools reflect genuine concerns of college admissions leaders and educators at other high schools, especially those not as elite as Sidwell Friends and St. Albans?

This year, *Inside Higher Ed* added questions on AP courses to the annual survey it conducts with Gallup of college admissions directors. Further, questions on AP were included in *Inside Higher Ed's* first survey of high school counselors, conducted with Hanover Research. Both surveys found both support for AP and doubts about aspects of the program -- particularly the pressure many high school students feel to take many AP courses. ← See example Common Data Sets

The high school counselors nationally (primarily from public schools) share the view of those at the elite private schools that students have come to see AP as a requirement. Two-thirds (67 percent) said that students have come to believe that taking AP or International Baccalaureate courses is "essential" for college admissions.

And more than half (55 percent) said they believed that students at their high schools "may pass up important opportunities" to take as many AP courses as possible.

With regard to whether their high schools offered enough AP or IB courses, there was some difference in views by wealth of students served. Over all, 37 percent of counselors said they worried that an insufficient number of AP or IB courses at their schools limited the opportunities for students in college admissions. But at high schools with a high percentage of students on free and reduced lunch, the percentage was 49 percent. A student may take an AP exam irregardless of taking the course

How AP Is Viewed by Admissions Leaders

In the survey of college admissions directors, respect was seen for the quality of AP. Seventy percent said that they considered AP courses to be rigorous. An even higher percentage (74 percent) said the same of IB courses. Only 59 percent said that was true of "most" honors courses in high schools.

Despite the widespread view that students should take as many AP courses as possible to improve admissions odds, college admissions directors said this was not necessarily the case. Only 9 percent said that their college favors applicants with AP courses on their transcript over those with honors courses only. ← See example Common Data Sets

Further, 62 percent said they believed that many students are taking too many AP courses, and 53 percent said they were worried about inequities based on which students had access to greater number of AP courses in high school.

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ns over those inequities may be shaping how they view the announcement by the elite private schools about leaving AP. Two-thirds (66 percent) said **it was easier for those schools than for most others to drop out of AP.** But nearly three-fourths said that students at high schools that offer advanced courses that are not AP would not be disadvantaged in the process.

Read more by [*Scott Jaschik*](#)

This is because these elite high schools' quality is already well known to college admissions offices. One general benefit of AP courses and standardized testing--to admissions officers--is to neutralize or validate the grading practices and teaching quality across schools nationally.