Advancing Beyond APs

Durham Academy
How We Got Here

2017: Pre-k-12 Curriculum Alignment focus: what do we want our graduates to be able to do?

2018: Enterprise Risk Management Committee focus: what could threaten DA’s success in college admissions?

2020: Advancing Beyond AP Task Force convenes; research focus.

2022: DA Board of Trustees endorses Advancing Beyond AP curriculum.

2022-2023: Upper School faculty professional development; focus on Advancing Beyond AP curricular architecture. Begin student/family/college admissions officers education.

2023-2024: Continued curricular development of advanced courses; structure, prerequisites, scope and sequence.

2024-2025: Fully sunset APs; initiate advanced courses.
Academic Excellence at DA ⇒ Thriving in College and Beyond

- An exceptional education that
  - prepares students for success in college and life
  - encourages students to discover and pursue their intellectual passions
  - helps students develop 21st century skills

- A rigorous, unique curriculum that
  - is grounded in relevant, flexible learning
  - is dynamic, interactive, authentic, and meaningful
  - better leverages the talents of our faculty and students
  - positions DA among the leaders of independent school teaching and learning

- A learning experience that helps students succeed in college admissions, college, and beyond
The Traditional AP Landscape Has Shifted

- The AP system is outdated and inflexible. Colleges and universities know it and they are giving less credit for APs with every passing year.

- Top independent schools have been advancing beyond AP for decades. This trend is accelerating.
Beyond APs is Becoming Best Practice

Three years ago, Berkeley Carroll and other top independent NYC schools stopped offering AP courses. Who’s benefitting? The students.

Opinion | Our schools will get rid of AP courses. Here’s why.
By Eight Heads of Washington Area Private Schools
June 18, 2018 at 4:39 p.m. EDT

AP Classes Are a Scam
The College Board earns over half of all its revenues from the courses—and, in an uncertain environment, students keep being suckered.
By John Tierney
Peer Schools Have Led The Way, DA Needs to Join Them

- Agnes Irwin School (PA)
- Annie Wright Schools (WA)
- Archer School for Girls (CA)
- Athenian School (CA)
- The Baldwin School (PA)
- Beaver Country Day (MA)
- Berkeley Carroll (NYC)
- Berwick Academy (ME)
- Bosque School (NM)
- Boston University Academy (MA)
- Brearly School (NYC)
- Calhoun School (NY)
- Cambridge School of Weston (MA)
- Cary Academy (NC)
- Cascades Academy (OR)
- Cate School (CA)
- Catlin Gabel (OR)
- Choate Rosemary Hall (CT)
- Christchurch School (VA)
- Concord Academy (MA)
- Crystal Springs Upland School (CA)
- Dalton School (NYC)
- Derryfield School (NH)
- Episcopal High School (VA)
- Ethical Culture Fieldston School (NYC)
- Fountain Valley School (CO)
- Georgetown Day (DC)
- Germantown Friends (PA)
- Holton-Arms (MD)
- Haverford School (PA)
- Horace Mann (NYC)
- Kiski School (PA)
- Lakeside School (WA)
- Landon School (MD)
- Lawrenceville School (NJ)
- Lick-Wilmerding (CA)
- Lincoln School (RI)
- Loomis Chaffee (CT)
- Maret School (DC)
- Marin Academy (CA)
- McDonogh School (MD)
- National Cathedral (DC)
- New Roads School (CA)
- Nightingale-Barnford (NYC)
- Nueva School (CA)
- Packer Collegiate Institute (NY)
- Park School (MD)
- Phillips Academy Andover (MA)
- Phillips Exeter (NH)
- Pingree School (MA)
- Poly Prep CDS (NYC)
- Pomfret School (CT)
- Potomac School (VA)
- Riverdale Country School (NYC)
- Sandia Prep (NM)
- Sidwell Friends (DC)
- St. Albans (DC)
- St. Ann’s (NYC)
- St. Luke’s School (CT)
- St. Mark’s School (MA)
- St. Paul Academy and Summit School (MN)
- St. Paul’s School (NH)
- Spence School (NYC)
- University Liggett School (MI)
- Urban School of San Francisco (CA)
- Western Reserve Academy (OH)
- Westtown School (PA)
- William Penn Charter (PA)
- Wooster School (CT)
“My AP Environmental Science class changed its content and we couldn’t explore the social and economic consequences of important issues like urban decay, suburban sprawl and redlining policies — all readily evident right here in Durham.”

“I’d love to spend more time exploring a variety of resources and build bigger projects around them, but I couldn’t under the AP time crunch.”

“There’s not enough time or flexibility to be able to delve into complex topics.”

*Upper School Faculty Feedback*
APs Limit Learning

What gets left out and left behind:

- Student inquiry
- Independent problem-solving
- Deep and enduring understanding
- Application of knowledge and skills to relevant situations
- Research
- Authentic demonstrations of learning
Sacrificing Real-World Relevance: AP European History

Students crave one thing from their educational experience — RELEVANCE.

An advanced curriculum freed from the constraints of teaching to a test opens the doors to discussions about:

- Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine
- China’s COVID-19 Lockdown Protests
- Iranian Anti-Government Protests
- Brittney Griner Prisoner Exchange
“The competitive side of ‘How many APs do you have?’ That’s toxic. It should be, “How much do you love your classes? What suits your interests best?”

“APs are really holding back the school...[they] are not a proxy for great classes.”

“In some ways, we have to dumb ourselves down to do well on the AP exams.”

“I wish we did more hands-on work.”

“In every AP class, there are moments where you want to dive deeper in something but the schedule doesn’t allow it.”

“I love the idea of getting rid of APs and gearing classes more toward creativity than just getting through the curriculum.”

“There should be more passion in the classes.”

*Class of 2022 Exit Interviews*
Colleges Support This Move

- Fall on-campus visits: 67 college admissions officers surveyed during their DA on-campus visits support this move. Only one (Tulane University) did not.

- Fall survey of DA’s 5-year matriculation list: consistent support from college admissions officers who have responded.
Colleges Reps Who Visited DA This Fall: Thumbs Up

Agnes Scott College
American University
Amherst College
Bowdoin College
Brandeis University
Brown University
Butler University
Case Western Reserve University
Centre College
Colby College
College of Charleston
Dartmouth College
Davidson College
Dickinson College
Duke University
Elon University
Emory University
Fairfield University
Fordham University
Franklin & Marshall College
Furman University
George Mason University
George Washington University
Georgetown University
Grinnell College
Guilford College
Harvey Mudd College
High Point University
James Madison University
Kenyon College
Lafayette College
Macalester College
Middlebury College
Northeastern University
Oberlin College
Princeton University
Queens University of Charlotte
Rice University
Rhodes College
Roanoke College
Sewanee - The University of the South
Skidmore College
St. Lawrence University
Swarthmore College
Syracuse University
Texas Christian University
Tufts University
Tulane University*
University of Alabama
University of Chicago
University of Miami
University of North Carolina-CH
University of North Carolina-Charlotte
University of North Carolina-Greensboro
University of Notre Dame
University of Pittsburgh
University of Southern California
University of Vermont
University of Virginia
Vassar College
Villanova University
Virginia Commonwealth University
Wake Forest University
Washington and Lee University
Washington University in St. Louis
Wofford College
Xavier University

*Colleges highlighted are among DA's most highly-attended schools
“DA provides a great school profile, so I don’t see any issues. DA is a known quantity here and we are highly confident that your students will come to Williams prepared for success.”
Williams College

“Duke knows DA well enough that this won't be an issue.”
Duke University

“We do not have any concerns over the changing curriculum.”
Harvard University

“No concerns — we evaluate each student within their individual high school context.”
Bowdoin College

“I have seen more schools make this transition and it has not hurt students in the admissions process.”
Kenyon College

“No [concerns]. We evaluate students based on the context of their school's offerings.”
Rochester Institute of Technology

“We do not [have any concerns].”
Elon University

“No [concerns]. They wouldn't be able to transfer the credits to SU if they took the tests.”
Syracuse University

“So long as a school profile is provided which indicates the courses offered and the relative rigor, we will have sufficient information.”
Olin College of Engineering

“More and more schools are going away from APs, and we're cool with that.”
Middlebury College

Question: Do you have any concerns about the transition from AP to advanced curriculum? Why or why not?
Colleges Understand and Value the Benefits of Beyond AP

Flexible, challenging, relevant courses:

- “[DA teachers/students] won’t be beholden to AP curricula or exams.” - Duke University
- “Students should take (and teachers should design) the courses of most interest to them.” - Middlebury College
- “The interdisciplinary nature of these types of courses are usually well-matched to our liberal arts curriculum.” - Harvard University
- Students truly only have the goal of learning in the forefront of their learning.” - Williams College

Depth of learning vs. teaching to a test:

- “Deeper exploration of the material” - Kenyon College
- “Thinking at a wider level and a deeper level in subject areas” - Xavier University
- “Broad thinking and a tolerance for academic experimentation” - Olin College of Engineering

Well being and balance:

- “Having a healthy school/life balance in high school is critical for setting the stage for college. In environments that push a large number of AP courses, students learn to over-commit and exhaust themselves.” - University of Georgia
- “It could relieve some pressure for students to try and take as many [APs] as they can, while still challenging themselves in a sustainable way.” - Oberlin College
- “Hopefully allows for less stress and rigidity of courses.” - Bates College

Question: What do you see as the potential benefits of moving beyond APs for students coming to your college or university?
Durham Academy is Known and Respected Nationally

“Excellent”
Duke University
Syracuse University

“Strong school, offers strong academic program”
James Madison University

“Strong”
Boston University
Elon University
Olin College of Engineering
Rochester Institute of Technology
University of Georgia

“DA is a known quantity here for sure, and we are highly confident that your students will come to Williams prepared for success.”
Williams College

“We have seen very strong applicants from DA, and matriculated many of them over the years.”
Bowdoin College

“We love Durham Academy! We know the challenge and rigor you all provide academically, but you also shape your students into wonderful members of society.”
Kenyon College

“We are confident students from DA can transition to our curriculum with and without added support.”
Harvard University

Question: How would you describe DA's academic reputation at your school?
What Colleges Seek: Curious Minds, Intellectual Stories

- Successful performance in accelerated, challenging, rigorous courses
- Sustained, focused interests vs. multitude of activities
- Academic curiosity and interests aligned with the college/university
- Alignment with the college/university’s values
- Involvement in extracurricular activities/organizations that are meaningful/impactful
- Demonstrated character, empathy, leadership, maturity and collaboration
- GPA
- College essay
- Recommendation letters
- Demonstrated interest or correspondence
- A special talent (arts, athletics)
- Additional connection to the institution (legacy or donor)
Invigorating DA’s Curriculum For Teachers and Students

Advanced Placement

- Teachers emphasize:
  - Breadth over depth at a fast pace
  - Teaching to a test

- Students learn to synthesize vast amounts of complex material at a fast pace

- Leads to ephemeral learning

Advanced Courses at DA

- Teachers emphasize:
  - Depth over breadth
  - Student inquiry
  - Global relevance
  - Independent problem-solving

- Students learn to:
  - Synthesize complex information
  - Apply knowledge and skills to real life
  - Engage in topics of genuine interest
  - Create authentic demonstrations of learning

- Leads to more enduring learning