

College Readiness *and* Workforce Challenges

Updated career and technical education offerings at a large, suburban high school combine with AP and other rigorous instruction to prepare students for college and careers.

AP enrollment for minority students is on par with general AP enrollment.

A template for AP success leads teachers and students to top levels of readiness.

In an address to Congress on February 24, 2009, President Barak Obama said, “In a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity—it is a pre-requisite.” Unfortunately, the College Board recently reported that “as of 2008, 58.9 percent of adults ages 25 to 64 across the nation had less than an associate degree” (Lee & Rawls, 2010, p. 12). Clearly, if significant changes in public education do not occur to ensure that young people are prepared for both college and work in a global economy, the nation’s social and economic health will continue to weaken.

One of the key points of agreement among educators is that highly successful schools must disseminate best practices so that all can benefit. Eastern Technical High School, part of Baltimore County (MD) Public Schools, is a career and technical education (CTE) high school where students gain the knowledge and skills they need to pursue a career in 1 of 10 career pathways while also taking challenging academic courses at the gifted and talented, honors, and AP levels. Students are fully prepared for both higher education and the workforce. The school is a model for practices that achieve excellent results.

How Did This Happen?

In 1992, Robert Kemmery was appointed principal of the school, and his first order of business was to invite corporate and education leaders to visit the school and make recommendations for program improvement. The CEO of Lockheed Martin Aircraft told him, “You may as well close this place. You are preparing students for jobs that will not exist a few years from now.” Thus, reform began at Eastern Tech in 1992 with substantial changes in focus and a name change from Eastern Vocational-Technical High School to Eastern Technical High School. Cosmetology, welding, and similar classes were phased out; career majors that were more attuned to the needs of the labor market and student interests were phased in. Those career majors include highly academic programs—such as engineering, information technology and allied health, teaching, law-related

Several students in the culinary arts program prepare cookies for an upcoming banquet.



Students in the information technology program repair computers that have been damaged.



A student completes a water lab for her biology class.



While in her interactive media production class, a student uses Photoshop to develop the title page for her public service announcement.



The emphasis at Eastern Tech is on consistently being better. We know we are a good school—our data indicate that we are a very good school. But are we the very best that we can be?

careers, and interactive media production—as well as more traditional technical programs—such as automotive technology, construction management, culinary arts, and business management and finance.

Students in Maryland must fulfill the requirements of a “completer” program to receive a high school diploma. In Baltimore County Public Schools, students may fulfill the requirements of one of three different completer programs: two credits of a world language and two electives, four credits in a chosen field, or two credits in an advanced technology and two electives. All students at Eastern Tech earn a “double-completer”—a minimum of four credits in their selected career major and at least two credits (most earn three or four) in a world language. Eastern Tech offers Spanish, Chinese, and Latin. In addition, all students are required to take a mathematics course each year—the current state graduation requirement is three courses—and most leave our school with five or six math credits. All students complete Algebra II by their sophomore year.

Although it has remained a CTE high school with 10 career major programs for

students, Eastern Tech has effectively combined high-quality academic requirements and CTE to become one of the highest performing high schools in Maryland and the nation. It was named a Maryland Blue Ribbon School of Excellence in 1997 and 2009, recognized as a top school by *Newsweek Magazine* and *U.S. News and World Report*, and named a 2010 National Blue Ribbon School. Eastern Tech has achieved this level of success by focusing on strategies in each of the core areas found in *Breaking Ranks II*: collaborative leadership; personalization; and curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Collaborative Leadership

The emphasis at Eastern Tech is on consistently being better. We know we are a good school—our data indicate that we are a very good school. But are we the very best that we can be? We choose to keep “great” as an unachieved goal so that we continue to focus on improvement. The leadership team at Eastern Tech believes in leading from the center and involving others in the decision-making process, including teachers, students, parents,

and community members. Improved student achievement and sustained success are the results of team efforts; teams have been central to the school's success in all areas, especially the AP program.

Eastern Tech's template for success in AP begins with various school teams that meet regularly. The core leadership team (composed of the content-area chairs and the administrators) and the career major leadership team (composed of a representative from each of the 10 career majors and the administrators) meet monthly, the ninth-grade interdisciplinary teams meet weekly, and the school improvement team meets once each semester.

Status meetings for each department are held every two weeks and are attended by the principal, the assistant principal assigned to the department, and the department chair. A typical status meeting agenda includes discussions about benchmark assessment data, classroom observation data, and curriculum implementation. Discussions center on trends in student subgroup performance.

The AP team, which includes all AP teachers, the AP coordinator, and the principal, meets four or five times each year to discuss best practices. Each of the core departments has created vertical teams that focus on grades 9 to 12 and also on data that has been gathered from Eastern Tech's feeder middle schools.

Our eyes and ears are on the content and skills that students need to succeed in college and the workplace. Each team and leadership group uses achievement data to adjust instruction. We have established school goals that are based on our district's Blueprint for Progress. Our goals for AP include achieving a 90% pass rate (we are currently at 84.3%), having 100% of the students who are enrolled in AP courses taking the AP exam (we are currently at 94.5%), and consistently enrolling more students in the AP program. Twenty-eight percent of Eastern Tech students currently take at least

one AP course; our goal for the next school year is to improve this percentage to 32%. All teams focus on improvement in every meeting.

Personalization

The driving forces behind our school's success are the relationships that teachers have established with students and the relationships students have established with what they learn. Both are important for success in school, especially in AP programs. When students are asked why they want to take AP courses when they know that doing so will affect their social lives and possibly their GPAs, their most common response is "the teacher." Our AP teachers build relationships with students that are similar to those of successful coaches and players, but perhaps even stronger.

▼
Ms. Bonincontri helps a student review AP practice problems in her AP Calculus class.



Eastern Technical High School

BALTIMORE, MD

Grades: 9–12

Enrollment: 1,350

Demographics: 73% White, 18% Black or African American, 6% Asian, 3% Hispanic or Latino; 22% free and reduced-price lunch

Administrative team: 1 principal, 3 assistant principals

Faculty: 84 certified teachers

Without strong relationships, other steps in our template for success could not be achieved.

The teachers have personalized their own content knowledge regarding AP courses through writing syllabi, taking courses, talking with other AP teachers, and serving as AP readers, but they know it is the relationships they build with the students that determine success. Those relationships are the result of matching students' needs with effective school practices, such as recognition, acceptance, trust, respect, purpose, and confirmation. In addition to the daily delivery of instruction, teachers also make themselves available to students using technology—wikis, podcasts, texting, and e-mails—to help ensure students' understanding and success.

Without strong relationships, other steps in our template for success could not be achieved. For example, our requirement that students complete AP assignments over the summer and remain in contact with their teachers—by accessing the class message board to clarify key points and discuss content—would not occur without strong, positive relationships. Our policy of honest grading would not be as effective without those relationships. Honest grading at Eastern Tech means that a student isn't graded for their attendance or their effort, but rather is graded according to

the level of knowledge they demonstrate relative to the AP exam. For example, a student who earns an A should be able to achieve a 5 on the AP exam, a student with a C should be earning a 3, and so on. Absent positive relationships, many students would opt out of AP courses for easier courses and higher GPAs.

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

The focus at Eastern Tech is on student achievement, and central to that is the business of teaching and learning. The curriculum is driven by the Maryland Content Standards, which will soon be supplanted by the education national standards. The standards help all teachers and administrators understand what students should know and be able to do in each high school course. The standards, coupled with a classroom-focused improvement processes, are the keys to Eastern Tech's accomplishments. For example, the template for AP success is one of many best practices that guarantee student success.

TEMPLATE FOR AP SUCCESS

The template for AP success outlines the various planning and AP activities that are held throughout the year.

Summer. Academic success begins with the work students do in the summer. At the conclusion of each year, the AP team holds a meeting to reflect on the program strengths and improvement needs for the next year. Vertical teaming in each department is essential to this process. Each vertical team looks at what students need to be successful in an AP course and creates a backward map of the skills they need to ninth grade—and, in some cases, back to middle school. The teams create summer assignments for students who will be taking AP courses the following year and establish interactive message boards so that students have continual access to their teachers throughout

the summer months. Teachers use the summer to participate in professional development activities, such as national conferences or summer workshops.

Fall. When school resumes, each department revisits the decisions made by the vertical teams to make adjustments, if necessary, or to reaffirm direction. Honest grading practices are put in place to help students see the relationship between their daily work and success on the AP exams; although the equivalency is inexact, every effort is made by AP teachers to give students a realistic look at their potential score based on the grades they earn in the course. A back-to-school meeting is held with the AP team to review the scores from the previous year, discuss best practices, and develop goals for the new year.

Winter. Honest grading practices continue. During the winter months, Eastern Tech uses the AP Potential data that is sent by College Board and the input of staff members to identify prospective AP students for the following year. (AP Potential is a free, Web-based tool that allows schools to generate rosters of students who are likely to score a 3 or better on a given AP exam on the basis of their PSAT/NMSQT scores.) Those students and their parents are invited to AP Night to hear about the program. Personal letters are sent to potential AP students from each of the AP teachers inviting them to participate; however, any student who wishes to take the AP challenge may register for an AP course. Eastern Tech's AP policy is open access, within reasonable limits and with appropriate counseling of students.

Spring. The AP exam is given. The AP team meets to reflect on the year and make plans for the future. AP teachers meet with next year's AP students to discuss and assign meaningful summer assignments. Communication is established for the summer months.

Overall, the teachers and leaders at Eastern

Tech have developed a culture of continual improvement by analyzing data and using data to inform instruction. The AP teachers reach out to other schools to share information and to develop their own skills. We have created a "farm team" of future AP teachers by assigning them to pre-AP courses and by having them attend AP conferences and other events. We even rename one of our classrooms each year in honor of the student who has the highest AP average and bring that student back for a special ceremony in his or her honor.

Results

As a result of the planning we do, Eastern Tech's AP participation has increased by 400% in the last seven years, and 84% of the AP students in 2010 earned a passing score of 3, 4, or 5. Since the 2004–05 school year, the AP participation rate has jumped from 11% to 28%, and the number of tests taken increased from 264 to 678 during the same period. Of the total school population of 1,350 students, 85% are now enrolled in rigorous courses (honors, gifted and talented, or AP), and 81% of the school's minority population is also enrolled in these rigorous courses, making Eastern Tech a model for other high schools in the country. **PL**

REFERENCES

- Lee, J. M., Jr., & Rawls, A. (2010). *The college completion agenda: 2010 progress report* [Executive summary]. New York, NY: College Board.
- Obama, B. (2009, February 24). *Remarks of President Barack Obama—As prepared for delivery: Address to joint session of Congress*. Retrieved from www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-of-President-Barack-Obama-Address-to-Joint-Session-of-Congress/

Thomas G. Evans (tevans@bcps.org) is the principal of Eastern Technical High School in Essex, MD.

Harry J. Cook (hcook@bcps.org) is chairman of the English Department at Eastern Technical High School.

We have created a "farm team" of future AP teachers by assigning them to pre-AP courses and by having them attend AP conferences and other events. We even rename one of our classrooms each year in honor of the student who has the highest AP average and bring that student back for a special ceremony in their honor.