



KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

Office of Superintendent

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M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: January 4, 2009
TO: Members, School Board
FROM: Steve Atwater, Ph.D. 
Superintendent of Schools
RE: Review of Weighted Grades

Background: At our October meeting worksession we discussed our policy (AR 6146.1) that provides a weighted grade for students taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses. You asked that I review our use of AP courses and in particular, research the level of importance that students place on weighted grades when considering taking an AP class.

Each of our secondary and K-12 principals received a survey that asked 8 questions. Seven of our secondary schools (Connections, Homer High School, Kenai Central, Nikiski Middle-High, Seward High, Skyview and Soldotna High) offer AP courses. The results of this survey are included with this memo. As you can see, the responses to the survey questions varied, but most students taking AP classes state that the weighted grade was significant or very significant when considering whether to take the class. Also of interest is the disparity of the participation in the UA Scholars Program by those students taking AP courses. Ninety-four percent of Soldotna High School students who earn the UA Scholars distinction use the weighted grade benefit while only 14% of the Kenai Central High students in this same category take advantage of this.

It is important to note that the issue at hand is not AP courses, but whether we want to continue our policy of giving a weighted grade as a part of an AP class. The District strongly supports the offering of AP courses and is confident that the overall quality of the AP Program at KPBSD remains high. Also of note is that students do not need to take the end-of-course exam to be eligible for the weighted grade. I mention this since some argue that taking an AP class is a good indicator of future college success. This is not accurate. A strong score on the AP exam is the good indicator of success in college.

Finally, earlier this year a student stated to you that it was unfair that AR 6146.1 did not apply to college courses. Gary Turner, Director of KPC, has prepared a list of college courses that he feels are worthy of the same weighted grade status as the AP courses. This list is included with this memo.

Reason for Review: Some of our parents and students consider weighted grades to be divisive since those that have the opportunity to privately travel to another high school for an AP course have an unfair advantage in GPA calculation at their home school. The request to expand AR 6146.1 to include weighted grades for college courses also needs your consideration.

Possible Recommendations

1. Refer AR 6146.1 to the Policy Committee for their review and possible revision
2. Leave AR 6146.1 as is

Kenai Peninsula Borough School District Weighted Grades Administrator Survey

December 2009

School/Administrator Name	1. Does your school offer AP course(s)?	2. Is the number of students at your school taking AP courses?	3. If you do offer AP course(s), then please ask your students the significance of receiving a weighted grade as part of their decision to take the AP course(s).			
			Very significant	Significant	Somewhat significant	Not at all significant
Connections, Lee Young	Yes	Growing			0.1	
Homer High, Allan Gee	Yes	Growing	XX			
Kachemak Selo, Randy Creamer	No					
Kenai Alternative, Loren Reese	No					
Kenai Central High, Alan Fields	Yes	Staying the same	0.08	0.28	0.18	0.46
Nikiski Middle-High, John O'Brien	Yes	Staying the same		Almost all		
Ninilchik, Terry Martin	No					
River City Academy, Gregg Wilbanks	No					
Seward High, Trevan Walker	Yes	Staying the same	0.6	0.2	0.2	
Skyview, Randy Nell	Yes	Falling	18 percent	46 Percent	18 percent	18 percent
Soldotna High, Todd Syverson	Yes	Growing	51 students	26 students	7 students	0
Spring Creek, Wayne A. Young	No					
Voznesenka, Alex Trout	No					
Susan B. English School, Sherry Hingley	No					

No responses received from Homer Flex, Hope, Nikolaevsk, Nanwalek School, Port Graham School or Tebughna Schools

School/Administrator Name	4. Do students at your school take AP courses at another high school?		5. Do students at your school independently take AP courses?	
	Yes or No	If yes, how many students do this?	Yes or No	If yes, how many students do this?
Connections, Lee Young	Yes	5 or less	Yes	3 or less
Homer High, Allan Gee	No		No	
Kachemak Selo, Randy Creamer	No		No	
Kenai Alternative, Loren Reese	No		No	
Kenai Central High, Alan Fields	Yes	2	No	
Nikiski Middle-High, John O'Brien	No	on rare occasions	Yes	1-2 yearly
Ninilchik, Terry Martin	No		No	
River City Academy, Gregg Wilbanks	No		No	
Seward High, Trevan Walker	No		No	
Skyview, Randy Nell	Yes	none currently	Yes	none currently
Soldotna High, Todd Syverson	No		No	
Spring Creek, Wayne A. Young	No		No	
Voznesenka, Alex Trout	No		No	
Susan B. English School, Sherry Hingley	Yes	1	Yes	1

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School/Administrator Name	6. The UA scholars program that offers tuition support to Alaskan students who graduate in the top ten percent of their class is a motivation for students to attain a high GPA. Of the graduates from your school (over the past 5 years) that have used the UA scholars award, what percent of them took AP classes with weighted grades?	7. Some of our students take college level courses for dual credit. As you may know, there is some interest in having these courses receive the same weighted grade status as the District's AP courses. Does your staff support expanding the weighted grades regulation to include college courses?	8. Please provide any additional comments that generally reflect your site's sentiment toward students earning weighted grades for AP courses.
Connections, Lee Young	0.04	Yes	We would like to see Valedictorian and UAA Scholar Award based on HSGQE scores and weighted grades eliminated.
Homer High, Allan Gee	To my knowledge, there is not a tracking mechanism for students who used the UA Scholars award.	No	I shared this topic with our Homer High Site Council and asked for their input. They like the current admin regs supporting the weighted classes and do not want this to change at Homer High. They also do not want college classes weighted higher in the same manner as AP classes.
Kachemak Selo, Randy Creamer	0	Yes	#7 Brings up a different problem being not all college courses are rigorous and deserving of AP status. A review and approval process is needed for each college level course before they should be given advanced status and increased value. I do see Kachemak Selo offering advanced placement courses in the future if our current quest students remain at our school.
Kenai Alternative, Loren Reese	zero	No	

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Kenai Central High, Alan Fields	96% of students who qualify as UA scholars took AP classes however, only 14% of those who qualified use the UA scholars, out of that 14% 100% took AP classes.	No	<p>See Site Council request for waiver>>></p> <p>The current regulation creates a system that is unfair to all students. Students that can afford to take correspondence Advanced Placement (AP) classes in addition to those that are offered at KCHS or drive to other schools to take AP classes in addition to those offered that are offered at KCHS receive an advantage over those that cannot. Additional time spent by students driving to and from schools increases the potential risks to student safety.</p> <p>The current system does not account for the fact that not all KPBSD schools offer the same number of AP courses. It assumes that all students who transfer to KPBSD or within KPBSD schools have the opportunity to take the same number of AP courses. The current system also assumes that all AP courses are equally demanding and that the grading requirements of those courses are equal. KPBSD is a diverse district with many schools who offer a wide variety of educational</p>

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Kenai Central High, Alan Fields (continued)			opportunities. There is not consistency between schools on what opportunities are available to students. Students who transfer to KPBSD schools may have opportunity to take far more or fewer AP courses than those who are currently students in KPBSD. We feel the honor diploma encourages more students to take the AP classes offered and is fair to all students.
Nikiski Middle-High, John O'Brien	1	No	
Ninilchik, Terry Martin	0	No	
River City Academy, Gregg Wilbanks	0	Yes	
Seward High, Trevan Walker	1	Yes	Generally, most of the staff support weighting AP grades. However, our limited size means that we can only offer AP Calculus. Traditionally, only our high-end math students are in contention for validictorian and the UA Scholars Program. We have many students taking KPC English courses, but their efforts are not considered in determining GPA. Most staff see this as an unfair practice.
Skyview, Randy Nell	most	Yes	

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Soldotna High, Todd Syverson	0.94	No	<p>Soldotna High School uses weighted grades to recruit the "B" and "B+" students in an effort to have enough students to continue to offer the AP classes. We feel strongly that if we lose this tool, we will also lose some of our AP offerings.</p> <p>According to our Students our AP classes are at a much higher standard than those classes taught at KPC. Our teachers who also teach at KPC feel the same way.</p>
Spring Creek, Wayne A. Young	0	No	
Susan B. English School, Sherry Hingley	50%	Yes	Due to our small staff sizes high achieving students take AP classes through polycom or distant ed classes.
Voznesenka, Alex Trout	Zero	No	It is our belief that students taking AP courses deserve the opportunity for a slight bump to their GPA, however they need to be aware (counselor/principal) of the possibilities of taking an AP course may negatively impact them as well.

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KPC Courses that Correspond to AP Courses

AP Course	KPC Course	College Credit
Art History	ART 261, History of Western Art I	3
	ART 262, History of Western Art II	3
Biology	BIO 102, Introductory Biology	3
	BIO 103, Intro Biology Lab	1
	BIO 115 w/lab, Fund. of Biology I	4
Calculus AB	MATH 200, Calculus I	4
Calculus BC	MATH 201, Calculus II	4
Chemistry	CHEM 103, Survey of Chemistry	3
	CHEM 103L, Lab component	1
	CHEM 105, General Chemistry I	3
	CHEM 105L, Gen Chemistry I Lab	1
English Language	ENGL 111, Methods of Written Com	3
English Literature	ENGL 121, Intro to Literature	3
Environmental Science	ENVI 211, Earth Systems	3
	ENVI 211L, Earth Systems Lab	3
History	HIST 131, History of US I	3
	HIST 132, History of US II	3
	HIST 101, Western Civilization I	3
	HIST 102, Western Civilization II	3
Human Geography	GEO 101, Local Places/Global Reg.	3
Language	SPAN 101, Elementary Spanish I	4
	SPAN 102, Elementary Spanish II	4
Macroeconomics	ECON 201, Principles of Macroecon.	3
Microeconomics	ECON 202, Principles of Microecon	3
Music Theory	MUS 111, Fundamentals of Music	3
Physics B	PHYS 123, Basic Physics I	3
	PHYS 123L, Basic Physics I Lab	1
Physics C	PHYS 211, General Physics I	3
	PHYS 211L, General Physics I Lab	1
Psychology	PSY 111, General Psychology	3
Statistics	STAT 252, Elementary Statistics	3
Studio Art	ART 105, Beginning Drawing	3
	ART 111, Two Dimensional Design	3
	ART 113, Three Dimensional Design	3
US Government/Politics	PS 101, Intro to American Govern.	3
	PS 102, Intro to Political Science	3