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‘‘Developing your school’s AP program’’

This workshop was the most interesting & stimulating one I had today. I have been teaching AP Calculus for 3 years now and I have been appointed AP team leader last August. This workshop gave me all the ideas and inspiring thoughts I was looking for to move forward our AP program at our school. I am summarizing the key ideas below.

1. Offer more AP courses at you school! I quickly realize that we do not offer enough challenging AP courses at our school. At the moment, students can only choose 5 of the 33 available AP courses offered by the College Board. Ideas were shared by colleagues from different international schools that offering more AP courses online with the support of a motivating teacher at our school could be an excellent idea. It was mentioned that AP Biology is one of the most difficult course online, so it was recommended to avoid science courses as a start for online courses.
2. Promote the AP program everywhere! For the AP courses to be more popular and demanded by students, the AP courses need to be publicized. Suggestions were given that evenings sessions with students and parents should (starting in Grade 8) be done on a yearly basis. Seniors taking AP courses could act as promoters of the AP program and graduated students could come back to share their experiences with younger students. Another suggested idea is that AP results should be publicized in local newspapers, on the school website, to parents and to the school board.
3. Have a centrally located AP Moodle page. This page could describe the program (with the use of the College Board Power Points), explain courses offered at our school, and show the distribution of results from previous exams.
4. Vertical alignment is the key to success. It was of common agreement that students taking AP courses often lack some prior knowledge to be successful in these university level courses. Adding AP courses to a school raises the level of academic rigorousness at the high school level. To prepare students for AP success, vertical alignment must be done by teachers and begin with grade 12, moving all the way down to grade 7.
5. Have students and parents sign a contract. In June of the previous year, have students and parents sign a contract agreement in which they understand that
 - There will be more daily homework than any other regular classes
 - There will be at least 4 hours of homework weekly
 - There will be homework to be done over the Christmas break and during summer time
 - Student is expected to write the AP exam regardless of course achievement
 - Student is expected to come to school at least 2 Saturdays in March

6. Become an AP reader. It is recommended that teachers that have been teaching at least 3 years the same AP course should apply to the College Board to become chief reader. Chief readers are teachers that mark AP exams in June. The College Board pays \$1500US for five days of work, provides training, workshops, accommodation, food and return airfare to teachers. The teacher becomes the specialist of his domain and returns to his school with up to date resources & marked exams.
7. Manage your AP budget wisely. The cost of AP exams have increased from \$89US last year to 117\$ this year, but schools get to keep \$8 per exam when paying the College Board. Money can be used to buy resources, pay for substitutes to supervise AP exams and/or pay exam fees for underprivileged students.
8. Have junior students take AP exam. It was of common agreement that in Latin America, most students in Grade 9 who's Spanish is their first language can write successfully the AP Spanish Language exam without taking the course. Ideas were given that the top 5 students of each grade could receive paid AP exams fees (a \$117US scholarships) and write the AP Spanish Language exam. Students scoring 3 or above on this exam receive a humanities university credit by more than 4000 universities around the world.

Conclusion:

To increase the popularity and success of an AP program at your school, you need to start small (one AP course), then have a plan for growth. You need to publicize the courses offered and you need to talk about the success of students taking these courses. To improve the quality of the AP program at your school, you need to train your teachers, provide them with adequate resources and promote their professional growth.