

September 17, 2007

TO: Distribution

FROM: Joseph Wise
Superintendent of Schools

**SUBJECT: DUVAL COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (DCPS) RISES TO
CHALLENGES OF RIGOROUS HIGH SCHOOL COURSEWORK**

Like all counties in Florida and states across our nation, we have a long road ahead of us until we see every one of our students achieve high academic success. However, in Duval County some clear and encouraging signs have emerged that confirms we and, more importantly, our students are making great strides forward. After only our first full year of implementation of this component of our high school redesign project, it is especially noteworthy that:

- Three out of four DCPS students who took more rigorous Advanced Placement (AP) courses now possess college-level success after earning passing grades of A, B, or C.
- Our AP students tallied a 34.8% increase in eligibility for college credits.¹
- African American students qualifying for college credit (via AP) is up 52% from 2006 to 2007.
- More than 200 Duval County students have begun their sophomore year with college-level success by their scores on AP exams while in 9th grade.
- Minority students in DCPS outperformed their peers in Florida and the nation on all three sections – reading, mathematics and writing – on the SAT exam. For example, our Hispanic students outscored state and national peers from 19 to 42%. Duval’s African American test takers outpaced state and national peers by increasing from 4 to 16%.
- Enrollment in AP coursework has ballooned again this school year. African American AP participation up 182% from 2006 to 2007.

We have a long way to go but these and other early successes boost our determination to do what our School Board, administrators, staff, and teachers have committed – to eliminate, not simply narrow the achievement gap in Duval County by 2014.

One year ago, I reported that students of Duval County Public Schools had accepted the challenge set by the District, and—in unprecedented numbers—10,249 in 2006-07— up from 4,253 the previous year—had enrolled in multiple Advanced Placement courses at

¹ Source: Genesis student database, Duval County Public Schools.

all 19 high schools throughout our city/county. This memorandum is a report of our early progress.

In many sectors of our city, our state, and our nation, there has been a mistaken impression that Advanced Placement courses were designed for—and applicable to—only a select few. However, on the basis of scores on our Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) that is administered to our ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade students, *Advanced Placement Potential Reports*, and related data it became clear that a substantial number of our students have the academic skills to step up to college-level rigor. By accepting the challenge set by the District, these students have elected to undertake—and earn—college credit, and achieve mastery of certain college-level subjects while still in high school. Students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses get a head start on college; more importantly, nationwide statistics establish that participation in Advanced Placement courses while in high school significantly increases the likelihood of a student’s successful and timely completion of college—more so than any other factor. *Additionally, students who take AP courses and exams are much more likely than their peers to complete a bachelor’s degree within four years.*² Further, for students who elect to enter the workforce upon high school graduation (instead of proceeding immediately to college), completion of Advanced Placement courses can qualify them for certain highly skilled level jobs—with starting salaries commensurate with their advanced skills.

More than 14,200 students are currently enrolled in Advanced Placement courses offered by Duval County Public Schools this school year (up from 4,253 students just two years ago and 10,249 last year). This repeated increase in Advanced Placement participation directly results from three fundamental factors:

- The professional dedication of our educators and principals
- The support of our School Board members and other civic leaders, and
- Our state’s and District’s partnerships with the College Board funded in part by a generous investment by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

By offering greater numbers of students *Advanced Placement, Dual Enrollment, and Early College* opportunities, Duval County Public Schools is making unparalleled history. In providing opportunity that has not been historically afforded to American students, it has the data to demonstrate that its high school students are embracing high—and challenging—academic requirements. More importantly, our high school principals and teachers are working hard to effectively support and guide our students to ensure that each attains academic success in these advanced, dual enrollment and early college courses. There’s room for improvement but the results documented within this memorandum speak for themselves.

The District again is offering 9th grade students an Advanced Placement course entitled *AP Human Geography*. Last academic year, 2,326 ninth grade students enrolled in this

² Wayne Camara, “*College Persistence, Graduation, and Remediation*,” *College Board Research Notes* RN-19 (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 2003).

course—a challenging class for which they qualified—but one that not one freshman in Duval County had historically elected to take on previously. The exceptional number of ninth graders taking this course spoke volumes about their commitment to academic rigor—and about our District’s commitment to their success. More impressive are these results: 215 students qualified for potential college credit with scores of 3, 4, or 5 on the AP exams. We are proud of these students—who took the challenge to prepare for the journey of their lives. We’re equally proud of their teachers, who made and continue unparalleled efforts to assist and support them.

As an important stakeholder, we need your help. To ensure our students’ success, we need the entire Jacksonville civic, business, and philanthropic communities to embrace one straightforward vision: **connecting students to the triumph of achievement—and to the realization that there is a genuine future following graduation.** Our community must be vocal in encouraging all our youth in public schools to spend more time on rigorous academic endeavors. We need our business community to embrace a philosophy of *school first as a condition for student employment*. This means reasonable work hours that would allow students time to concentrate on studies after school. Think about what a strong message this would send to students and parents in all homes in Jacksonville. Additionally, we need to ensure that our students realize the significance of their choices, and understand how deeply we support them as they dedicate themselves to a rigorous academic program.

Nationwide studies evidence a direct link between high school student access to Advanced Placement courses and post-graduation success. Equally as important, Advanced Placement participation is connected to college completion—and *has been found to be a stronger indicator of future success than socioeconomic status or high school grade point average.*³

The inherent value of Advanced Placement courses for high school students is straightforward: these courses provide each student with more options—and with greater opportunities following high school graduation. Further, they result in:

- Higher high school graduation rates
- Greater propensity to complete a college education
- Greater competitiveness in a global workforce.
- Pride and self respect arising from academic achievement

The greatest value to our city is the creation of a stronger workforce and an education-focused culture within *all* communities among *all* students.

Duval County Public Schools is proud to be one of the first school districts in the nation selected by The College Board to participate in an innovative project designed to promote a college-going culture in secondary schools in large urban districts. We are grateful to Dr. Eric Smith, Senior Vice President, College Board, Governor Gaston Caperton,

³ Clifford Adelman, *Answers in the Tool Box: Academic Intensity, Attendance Patterns, and Bachelor’s Degree Attainment*, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education (1999).

President of the College Board, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for the funding of a four-year partnership focused on strategies and plans that identify assets and build capacity to create academic excellence and equity in our high schools. Our EXCEerator Schools' project provides (1) rigorous academic programs for all students; (2) professional development for superintendents, principals, teachers and counselors; (3) data to inform and drive teaching, learning and assessment; (4) college planning and preparation programs; and (5) developmental supports for students to create personalized learning opportunities.

Four Duval County Public Schools were initially selected to participate: *Samuel Wolfson, Terry Parker, Sandalwood and Robert E. Lee*. Further, College Board selected four additional schools—*Jean Ribault, William M. Raines, Andrew Jackson and First Coast high schools*—to participate in the EXCEerator opportunities that will enable our educators to learn and use best practices—so that students are exposed to meaningful post-secondary options. In addition, Duval County Public Schools has funded four additional high schools to mirror the EXCEerator work: *Englewood and Nathan B. Forrest high schools and Frank H. Peterson and A. Phillip Randolph Academies of Technology*.

One year ago, we began a journey that will connect students to more rigor and high standards, and to access and opportunity. The Duval County School Board has demonstrated its commitment to one attainable vision for Jacksonville: *We shall create the best high schools in America*.

For your information, please find enclosed detailed reports on Advanced Placement course enrollment and test results for the 2006-07 school year as compared to the 2005-06. These summaries also show the enrollment disaggregated by ethnicity for the 2005-06 and 2006-07 school years. In addition, disaggregated data of 2007 SAT exams are provided that shows gains made by our minority students. .

Duval County Public Schools is committed to providing all students with high-quality, rigorous education that will inspire them to dream and reach their goals. On behalf of our students and educators, thank you for your support and partnership.

JW:dm

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Enclosure