

Using PSAT Scores to Identify Honors/AP Potential

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Background

The College Board recommends using PSAT scores to recognize Honors/Advanced Placement (AP) potential among students who may be overlooked through other identification procedures, such as teacher recommendations, course grades, or self-nomination (Burton, et. al, 2002; College Board, 2004a, 2005a, 2005c). Identifying Honors/AP potential is important because, even among students whose PSAT scores are the same, those who complete Honors or AP courses leave high school better prepared for college or the workplace than those who remain in regular-level courses (Atanda, 1999; Camara, 2003; Von Secker, 2005). Many colleges and universities award college credit to students who earn AP exam scores of 3 or higher (Camara, 1997).

The College Board provides a free Web-based tool that schools can use to generate rosters of PSAT test takers who have Honors/AP potential in specific courses (College Board, 2005b). Access codes for this Web site are mailed to school principals in January and contain data for students who took the PSAT the preceding October.

Some question whether national results reported by the College Board are typical for those observed in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). The College Board (2005a) acknowledges that many factors other than PSAT scores (e.g., student preparation, student motivation, and parental support) influence students' AP exam scores. The purpose of this research brief is to show how PSAT scores can be used in MCPS to guide course selection decisions.

Methodology

The College Board reports PSAT verbal and math scores in increments of one on scales of 20 to 80 (College Board, 2005c). The AP test takers included in this analysis were those whose Grade 10 PSAT scores were within 2 points of the Grade 10 PSAT verbal (44) and math (45) mean scores. The five point PSAT score ranges are consistent with the

reporting increments used by the College Board (Camara, 1997, The College Board, 2004b).

Results

Research conducted for the College Board shows that, in many AP courses, about one third of students with PSAT scores below the national averages have Honors/AP potential and are able to attain AP exam scores of 3 or higher (Camara, 1997, Camara & Millsap, 1998). The relationships between PSAT scores and AP exam results that are observed nationally are reliable predictors of the Honors/AP potential of individuals enrolled in MCPS.

The percentages of MCPS students with Honors/AP potential who score 3 or higher on AP exams exceed the percentages reported for national samples. As many as two thirds of MCPS AP test takers with PSAT verbal scores of 42 to 46 or math scores of 43 to 47 attain AP exam scores of 3 or higher on AP English, mathematics, science, and social studies examinations (Table 1).

Table 1
Percentage of MCPS Students with AP Scores of 3 or Higher by AP Exam and PSAT Score Range

Selected AP Exams	PSAT Range	
	Verbal (42–46)	Math (43–47)
English Lang.-Comp.	39.1	
English Lit-Comp.	35.3	
Calculus AB		44.2
Calculus BC		36.7
Statistics		26.9
Biology	58.4	53.0
Chemistry	56.8	40.3
Environmental Science	34.6	42.7
European History	62.3	68.9
US Govt. & Politics	36.5	44.4
Psychology	62.6	64.9
World History	58.7	61.2

Note: Includes students who took the Grade 10 PSAT between October 2000 and October 2004 and took at least one AP examination prior to June 2005.

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