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Why AP classes are worth it even if students fail

A recent story in The Bee posed a critical question about whether schools should offer AP classes if most students fail the exams (“Advanced Placement students struggle on tests,” Local, July 23).



The answer is a resounding “yes.”

Taking an AP course has numerous benefits, including college credit for qualifying scores. Many Sacramento-area students are earning credit, and we should help more students do so.

At the same time, regardless of how students fare on the exams, they learn problem-solving, critical thinking and collaboration – skills required in college and the workforce. Research consistently shows that students who take AP exams are more likely to enroll in a four-year college, are better prepared and more likely to graduate in four years than students who don’t.

Even with these benefits, we suggest a different question: “What should change about how we prepare all our students before they reach AP courses?”

Rather than reinstating or expanding prerequisites, which only expand gaps in access and opportunity, schools can take many steps to ensure more students are set up for success. Our work with more than 1,000 schools over the past decade shows that supporting students and providing teachers with high-quality professional development and instructional resources results in greater success. Schools can do this while also helping more low-income students take more rigorous courses to prepare them for college and career.

It is no easy feat for a school to increase access to advanced courses and to increase the number of students earning qualifying scores, but we know it can be done. Our partner schools produce 10 times the annual increase in qualifying scores compared to the national average.

While earning college credit is a key measure for students taking AP courses, we cannot overlook the life-long skills they learn and the impact that can have on their success.

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