

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION
REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION

NO.: BHE 20-02

BOARD DATE: October 22, 2019

OTHER BUSINESS - AP CREDIT FLOOR MOTION

MOVED: The Board of Higher Education hereby instructs the Commissioner and Department of Higher Education staff to work with the Academic Affairs Committee (AAC) to review and report back to the Board of Higher Education on what criteria are being used by our public community colleges, state universities and the University of Massachusetts system to determine 1) what Advanced Placement (AP) courses are accepted for college credit; 2) whether students receive college credit for an AP examination qualifying scores of 3, 4 or 5; 3) whether the credit is for a specific major or general credit; and 4) data on student demographics for students who receive college credit for achieving a qualifying score on an AP examination.

VOTED: Motion adopted by BHE 10/22/2019.

Authority: Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Section 9(u)

Contact: Patricia A. Marshall, Ph.D., Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs and Student Success

Background

BHE Member Paul Toner presented this floor motion regarding institutional awarding of credit for AP coursework during the “Other Business” portion of the BHE meeting agenda on October 22, 2019. In support of this motion, BHE Member Toner presented the following rationale:

Many students in the Commonwealth endeavor to challenge themselves while in high school and seek to attain college credits in order to reduce the cost of tuition/courses in college through enrolling in and completing a variety of AP courses during their high school careers. Research shows that students who score a 3 or higher on AP examinations are much more likely to persist and graduate from college. While Massachusetts has led the nation in the percentage of the graduating class scoring a 3 or higher on the AP exam for three years in a row, we are in the minority of states that have adopted a uniform and transparent AP credit policy. Massachusetts is #1 in the country for producing HS graduates with scores of 3 but #40 in the country for public institutions who award credit for 3s.

Unfortunately, each of our 15 Community Colleges, 9 State Universities and the University of Massachusetts system all have differing requirements for acceptance of AP coursework and whether they give students any college credit for a qualifying score of 3 on an AP examination.

Currently an AP class might receive an A in the class and a qualifying score of 3 on the exam. However, this student, at some of the public institutions for some of the AP courses might not receive credit. Just an example: according to the College Board, a student who receives a three on a qualifying score in AP Physics 1 would receive college credit at Berkshire Community College but not at Bunker Hill Community College where a 4 is needed. That same student would receive credit at Framingham State University or U Mass Amherst, but not at Mass Bay Community College, Westfield State University, or Worcester State University.

Compare this to early college, where as long as a student passes the course, they will receive college credit for that course in high school.

The College Board reports that in 2017, 16,753 AP exam scores of 3 or higher were sent to Massachusetts public colleges and universities.

- *42% of scores sent by all students were scores of 3.*
- *For African-American students, 60% of scores sent were scores of 3.*
- *For low-income students, 54% of scores sent were scores of 3.*
- *For Latinx students, 50% of scores sent were scores of 3.*

A clear and consistent AP credit and placement policy can:

- *Ensure that prospective students and families know which institutions recognize AP achievement and award course equivalent college credit and advanced placement based on qualifying scores;*
- *Allow for the optimal application of qualifying AP scores for credit toward meeting general education requirements;*
- *Improve seamless course articulation and transfer, credit portability, and degree completion rates;*
- *Reduce the duplication and accumulation of excess credit hours, minimizing economic burdens for students and families, and improve enrollment efficiency for higher education systems.*

The Board of Higher Education and administration have admirably been endeavoring to provide more opportunities and pathways for high school students to experience college level work in high school and reduce the cost of obtaining college credits through early college high school and dual enrollment programs that provide students with college bearing credit and may even lead to an Associates Degree while completing high school. However, the Board currently has no policy requiring that a minimum qualifying score of 3 on AP examinations should qualify for college credit which would provide an additional opportunity for students to earn college credit and reduce the cost of a college education in Massachusetts.

I believe it is time for the BHE to rectify this situation by reviewing all the current campus policies, engaging the campus leadership and moving toward the creation of a uniform policy regarding AP courses, qualifying scores and college credit assigned.

After brief discussion of the above rationale, BHE Member Toner called for adoption of the motion which was seconded and approved unanimously.