

Massanda D'Johns, a senior at Castlemont High School in Oakland, Calif., will have taken six Advanced Placement courses by the time she graduates.

EXTRA CREDIT, EXTRA CRITICISM

Advanced Placement courses are increasingly being viewed as indicative of minority equity — and the indicators don't look good.

BY PAMELA BURDMAN

Massandra D'Johns has always planned to go to college, and now the Castlemont High School senior isn't taking any chances. Castlemont, in Oakland, Calif., offers six Advanced Placement courses, and at the end of her senior year, D'Johns will have taken them all.

"I might as well get the most I can while I'm in high school," she said during a recent lunch break in her AP English classroom. "Plus, it'll look good on my transcript. There are better opportunities if you have a college degree."

D'Johns, 17, plans to apply to three University of California campuses, as well as Clark Atlanta, Morris Brown and Howard universities.

And she thinks she stands a good chance of being admitted. Ranked first in her class, she boasts a grade-point average of 3.87, not counting the extra weight that UC schools give to AP courses.

That extra credit is at the heart of a drive to expand AP opportunities for high school students in California, with new state funds being dedicated to the program in response to a civil rights lawsuit that accuses the state of not providing equal access to the rigorous college-level courses.

The emphasis on AP is not, however, unique to California. That's partly because a U.S. Department of Education study of 1982 high school graduates concluded that students who took AP courses were more likely to complete college.

Increasingly AP is seen as an indication of school quality and a measure of equity — and in most places, equity is sorely lacking.

Of the roughly 750,000 students who took more than 1.2 million exams last May, only 5,000 — less than 5 percent — were African American. Minority students also tend to pass the classes at lower rates. While the national passing rate for AP classes nationwide is 65 percent, the rate is only about 33 percent for black students and about 50 percent for Latino students.

"Our numbers for African American participation are not what we would like them to be nationally," admits Dr. Frederick Wright, director of equity and access initiatives for AP at the College Board.

Many officials say the gap is not surprising, even that minority students are under-represented across the board when it comes to educational resources. But many people are seeking to expand opportunities.

In February, the College Board held a forum with the U.S. Department of Education to encourage states to promote AP and inform state officials of a pool of \$20 million available to help them.

But with many states spearheading efforts to expand Advanced Placement programs to under-served schools, and with College Board officials waving money to boost the effort, many higher education experts are wondering: What role will the Advanced Placement program play in helping better prepare minority students for college? And how much can the program really affect retention for student populations desperately in need of help?

STATE SUPPORT

The \$30 million earmarked by the California Legislature earlier this year includes \$8 million to expand a program to put AP courses online. The bulk of the money will go directly to high schools that offer few or no AP courses and have low college-going rates or a high number of low-income students. Some 550 schools are eligible for four-year grants of up to \$75,000 for expanding their AP curriculum.

The legislation was tailored to recommendations of educational experts connected to the lawsuit. But lawyers for the American Civil Liberties Union say they are not prepared to settle their suit based on legislation alone. Implementation, they say, is key.

"We're very concerned about how this affects students' abilities to have equal educational opportunities while in high school and in preparation for higher education," says ACLU staff attorney Rocio Cordoba.

The lawsuit and the legislation indicate how far AP has come from its roots in 1955, when three East Coast prep schools and three Ivy League institutions got together to provide a path for privileged students to get a jump-start on college work.

The AP program is overseen by the College Board and includes nationally standardized course curricula in 32 subjects, culminating with exams each May. Each year, more than 700,000 students take the exams, administered by Educational Testing Service. Those who score passing grades of 3, 4 or 5 can earn course credit and/or advance to higher level courses.

In California, where minority admissions to the state's premier public universities have lagged since the University of California Board of Regents decided in 1995 to abolish affirmative action, the availability of AP courses is particularly salient.

It is one issue on which Ward Connerly, the Black regent who led the drive for race-neutral

admissions, agrees with the ACLU.

"All high schools should be required to offer the courses," Connerly says. "It's tragic and ought to be illegal that many of them now do not."

University of California applicants get a 5.0 instead of a 4.0 for an A in AP and honors courses. Perhaps because of the fierce competition to enter the university system, California students already take one-sixth of the AP tests given across the country.

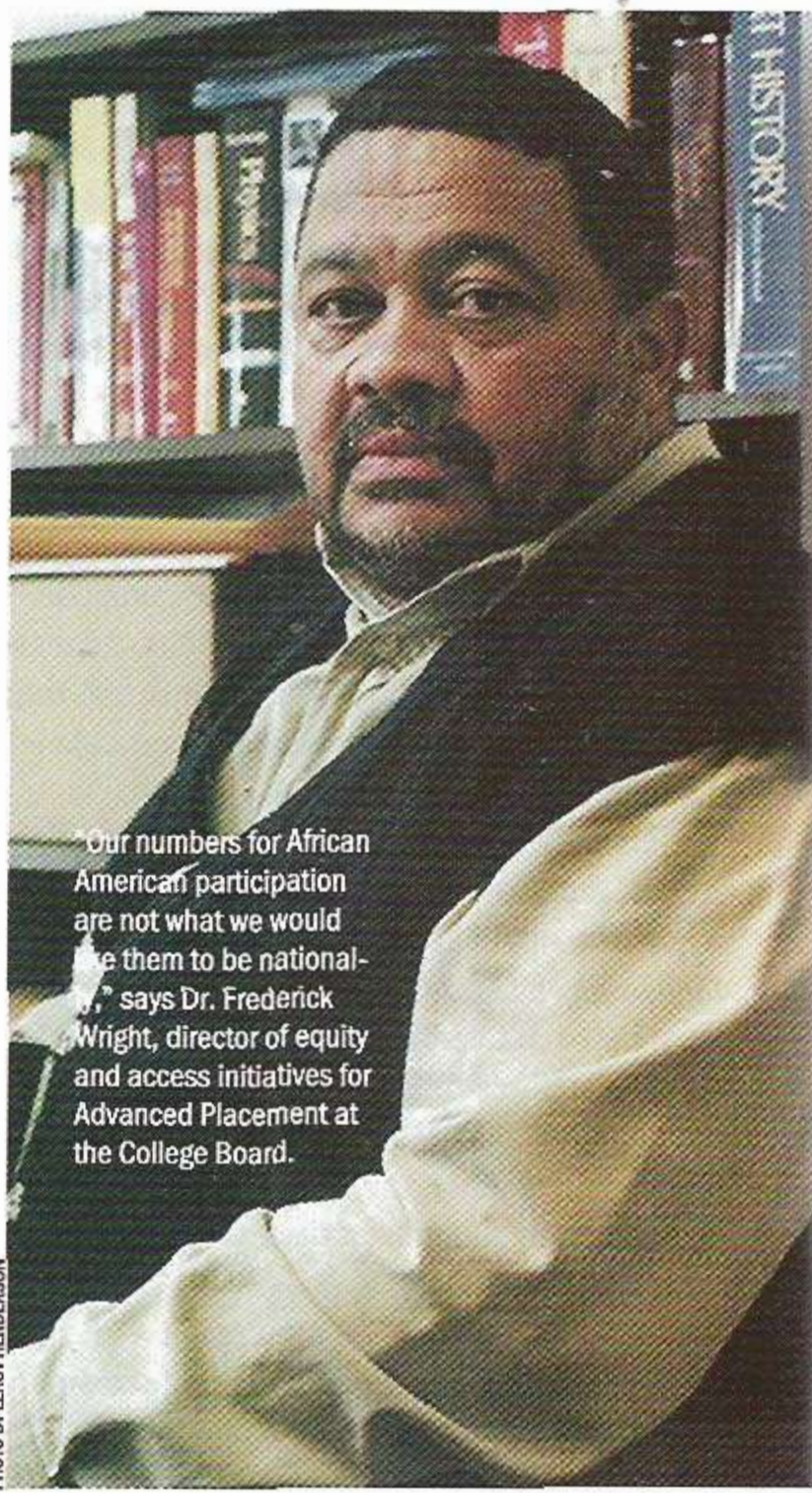
While some states have been supporting the AP program for years with teacher training institutes and exam fee reimbursements, Southern states have only recently begun to follow suit now that the federal money has become available.

In Alabama, for example, 5,992 students took 8,782 AP exams in May 1999, but just 611 of those students were African Americans.

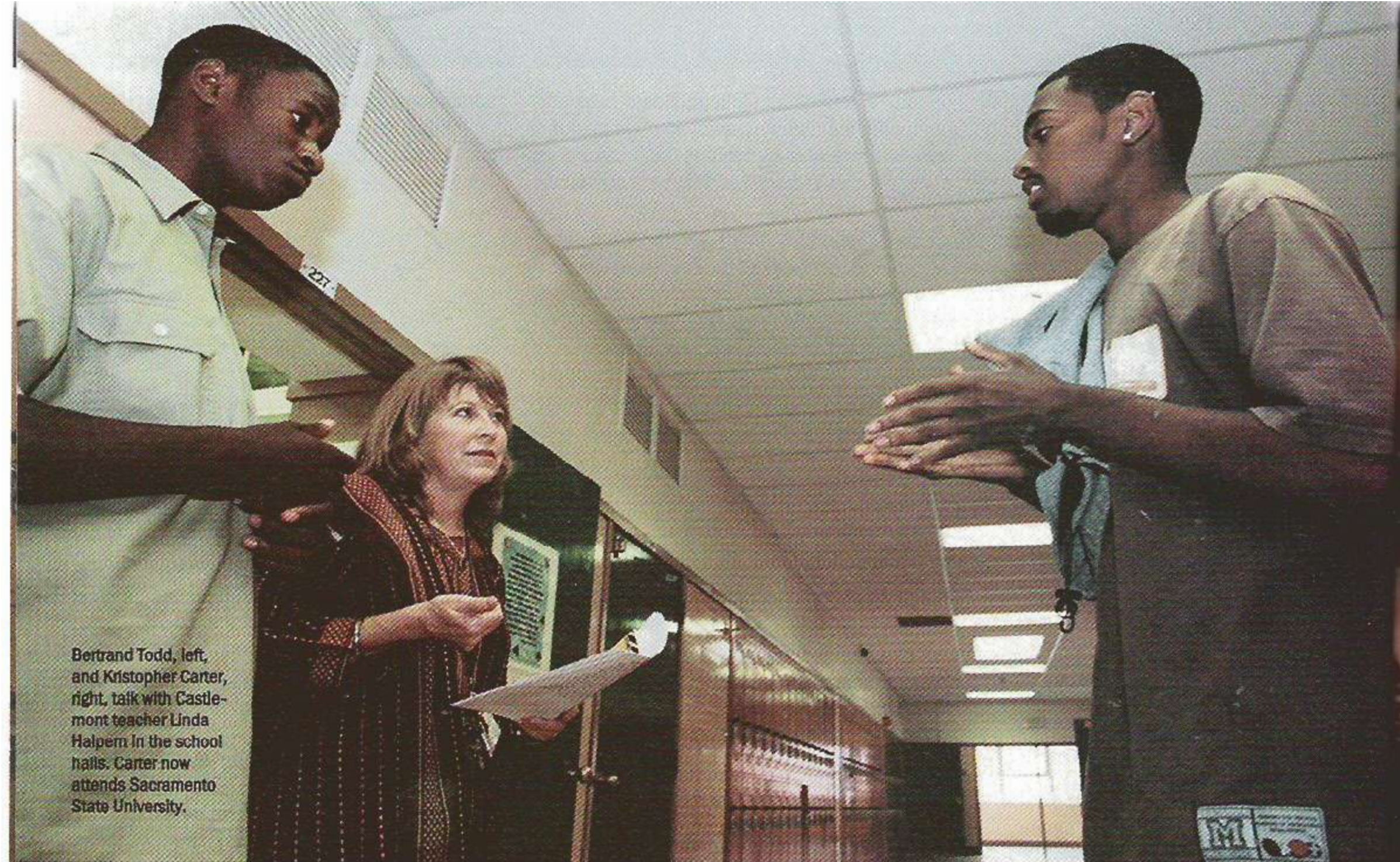
"That tells me that nobody, no matter what the color of their skin, is taking a whole lot of advantage of Advanced Placement," Wright says.

"It hasn't been an issue at the state level," says Frank Heatherly, an educational specialist with the Alabama Department of Education.

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"Our numbers for African American participation are not what we would like them to be nationally," says Dr. Frederick Wright, director of equity and access initiatives for Advanced Placement at the College Board.



Bertrand Todd, left, and Kristopher Carter, right, talk with Castle-mont teacher Linda Halpern in the school halls. Carter now attends Sacramento State University.

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'THE AP TYPE OF STUDENT'

Wright laments the fact that states like Alabama concentrate their limited dollars on programs to help the weakest students, figuring that, "the AP type of student is going to be successful no matter what."

But Dr. Kati Haycock, director of The Education Trust, a leading educational reform organization in Washington, D.C., is sympathetic to that view. She points to an apparent disconnect: While AP courses are the fastest growing segment of high school curricula, the fastest growing segment of college curricula is remedial education.

"I worry about this for the very kids for whom the AP courses are being argued — that's minority and poor kids. If you look at a high school master schedule, you'll find that the very best educated teachers are teaching AP, which has historically been the province of the most well-off kids," Haycock says. "You end up maybe advantaging a few more kids, but creating huge and greater disadvantages for all the rest of the kids."

She says AP is only an answer if it's "the tip of a triangle that pulls other kids forward."

That debate underscores the dilemma facing school systems like Oakland's, where adminis-

trators would like to see more kids advancing to college, but at the same time are coping with high dropout rates, truancy, teacher turnover and other challenges common to inner-city schools.

At John F. Kennedy High School in Richmond, Calif., for example, students enrolled in last year's AP Physics and AP English did not have a formal, long-term teacher for the entire school year. Many students declined to take the AP exams because they felt unprepared.

"There are always lots of pressing problems at a high school," says Dolores del Barco, an Oakland administrator who recently completed a two-year project aimed at increasing AP enrollment. The position was prompted by a U.S. Office of Civil Rights investigation into minority access to higher level courses.

Del Barco, now a vice principal at Fremont High School in Oakland, says the number of teachers trained in AP increased from 23 to 66 last year, and the number of students enrolled went up from 913 to 1,090. She expects this year's numbers to be higher yet. And most Oakland schools would be eligible for the state's AP challenge grants to further enhance the AP program.

A LONG WAY TO GO

But Dr. Harriette Stevens, director of UC

Berkeley's Alliance for Collaborative Change in School Systems, says there is still a long way to go before minorities are enrolling in AP courses in high numbers.

"Even in the schools that have a very high proportion of African American students, it's not necessarily reflected in the advanced courses," Stevens says, adding that few AP

College Performance for AP Test Takers

According to the unpublished statistical report, *Advanced Placement Students in College: An Investigation of Course Grades at 21 Colleges*, AP students "performed very favorably when compared to students who took the prerequisite courses.

"For every exam/course level combination...those receiving AP grades of 5 had higher course grade averages than the students who took the prerequisite course. In all but three cases, the grade difference was at least 0.30 GPA and, in the majority of the course levels, the difference was greater than 0.50 GPA. For half the entries, students earning AP grades of 4 outperformed the students who

Castlemont High School teacher Linda Halpern lectures students during an Advanced Placement English class.

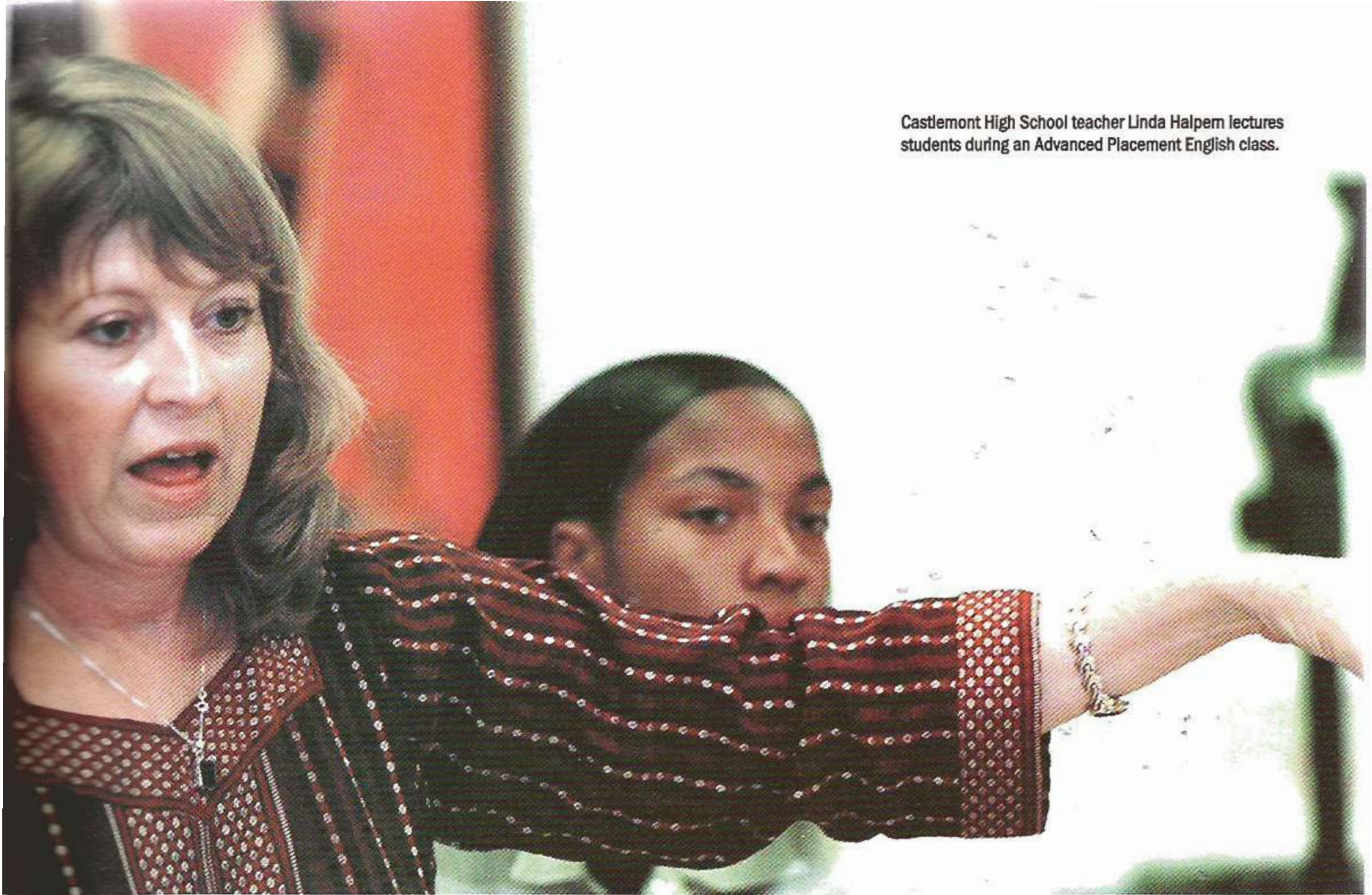


PHOTO BY ADAM TRAUW

teachers are African American. "There's a lot of work to be done in that area."

Under Stevens, Berkeley's ACCESS program provides professional development for math teachers to teach advanced curriculum in Oakland and other districts. While offering the courses is one challenge, preparing kids to take them is another. "If you look at an eighth-grade

algebra course, that's where you want to see the diversity," Stevens says. "If you don't have it there, you're probably not going to see it at the 12th grade."

Linda Halpern, D'Johns' English teacher and a 31-year veteran of Castlemont, agrees that the AP program still isn't serving Black students as well as it could. Though about two-

thirds of Castlemont's students are African American, she has only seven Black students in her AP English Language class of 37.

Halpern also says some students who signed up to take AP courses weren't scheduled into the classes. "There's a spirit of lower expectations for these kids," she says.

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took the prerequisite course by at least 0.25 GPA. Those with AP grades of 3 who received advanced placement outperformed students who took the prerequisite course in 27 of the 40 exam/course level combinations.

"Based on the results of this investigation, for most AP Exams, students with AP grades of 4 and 5 did extremely well in the initial coursework after being placed out of the introductory course... Students with AP grades of 3...received average course grades better than 3.00 (in the majority of courses) and more often than not earned course grade averages higher than students who took the introductory courses. This is even more impressive when one considers that AP students were taking their first course in the department and were compared to students who have already experienced at least one course at the college in the subject area."

Summary of College Course Level Information (Selected Courses)

AP Exam	Course Level	Number of AP Students	Number of other Students	Number of Courses	Average Course Grade Comparison with All Students Who Took Lower-Level Courses		
					AP 5	AP 4	AP 3
Art History	Second	30	216	11	+0.31	-0.29	-0.16
Biology	Second	666	7,646	31	+0.54	+0.25	-0.05
Calculus AB	Second	3,114	11,212	29	+0.71	+0.27	+0.15
Chemistry	Second	372	11,185	20	+0.67	+0.58	+0.39
Econ. Macro	Second	91	2,387	21	+0.43	-0.20	+0.21
Econ. Micro	Second	74	2,913	19	+0.36	+0.08	-0.31
English	Second	29	9,282	30	+0.46	+0.38	+0.14
French	Fourth	106	1,462	14	+0.74	+0.47	+0.37
Music Theory	Second	187	1,503	17	+0.39	+0.44	+0.09
Spanish	Fourth	246	3,015	20	+0.35	+0.39	+0.24

SOURCE: THE COLLEGE BOARD



Dr. Harriette Stevens, director of UC Berkeley's Alliance for Collaborative Change in School Systems, says there is still a long way to go before minorities are enrolling in AP courses in high numbers.

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Halpern says she can count on two hands the number of Castlemont students of any race who have passed AP exams in any subject in the last several years. She blames deficient preparation and insufficient commitment on the part of the school, but she also notes impediments in the exams themselves. If the English exams con-

centrated more on American English than on British English, she says, her students would do better.

Nevertheless, Halpern believes the experience is still invaluable preparation for college.

D'Johns agrees. She took AP exams in English, U.S. history, and chemistry last year. She scored a 1 in chemistry, a 2 in history and an-

other 2 in English. Though her scores won't allow her to skip those classes in college, D'Johns still will receive extra credit for those classes when she applies to the University of California. The three historically Black colleges to which she applies also are bound to look at her challenging high school curriculum when they review her application and see her as a student

A Sampling of Advanced Placement Performance by State and Ethnicity

State	11th & 12th Graders	Number of Candidates		2000 Candidate Totals by Ethnicity				2000 Candidate Percentages by Ethnicity			
		1999	2000 Minorities	Non-Black American	African	White	Other* Minorities	Non-Black American	African	White	Other*
Ala.	97,235	5,992	5,645	375	633	4,488	149	7	11	80	3
Calif.	795,718	119,358	131,361	64,189	3,756	52,278	11,138	49	3	40	8
D.C.	8,461	1,799	2,097	293	545	1,037	222	14	26	49	11
Fla.	290,609	40,706	45,234	11,832	3,300	27,737	2,365	26	7	61	5
Ga.	168,028	18,574	20,460	1,958	2,995	14,568	941	10	15	71	5
Ill.	293,524	26,740	29,944	6,138	1,566	20,906	1,334	20	5	70	4
Ky.	91,497	6,806	7,575	311	142	6,929	193	4	2	91	3
La.	101,128	3,290	3,458	365	378	2,593	122	11	11	75	4
Md.	116,883	17,746	19,680	2,890	1,784	13,813	1,193	15	9	70	6
Mass.	138,919	19,669	21,305	2,510	496	16,885	1,414	12	2	79	7
Miss.	61,956	2,972	2,715	100	442	2,084	89	4	16	77	3
N.J.	171,470	23,866	24,997	5,694	1,002	16,637	1,664	23	4	67	7
N.M.	43,619	3,072	3,303	1,195	47	1,797	264	36	1	54	8
N.Y.	387,333	70,201	74,578	15,246	4,345	49,524	5,463	20	6	66	7
N.C.	150,581	20,170	21,871	1,525	1,752	17,864	730	7	8	82	3
Ohio	293,851	21,856	23,268	1,558	893	19,810	1,007	7	4	85	4
Penn.	285,878	25,004	26,933	2,122	633	22,833	1,345	8	2	85	5
S.C.	82,036	10,549	10,300	562	1,441	8,022	275	5	14	78	3
Tenn.	110,311	9,080	9,464	660	835	7,626	343	7	9	81	4
Va.	150,220	28,047	29,016	4,225	2,105	21,110	1,576	15	7	73	5
Total											
U.S. 2000	6,425,520		747,922	164,192	36,158	504,600	43,422	22	5	67	6

1999 Total U.S. AP exams = 1,122,414
 2000 Total U.S. AP exams = 1,242,324

likely to succeed in college.

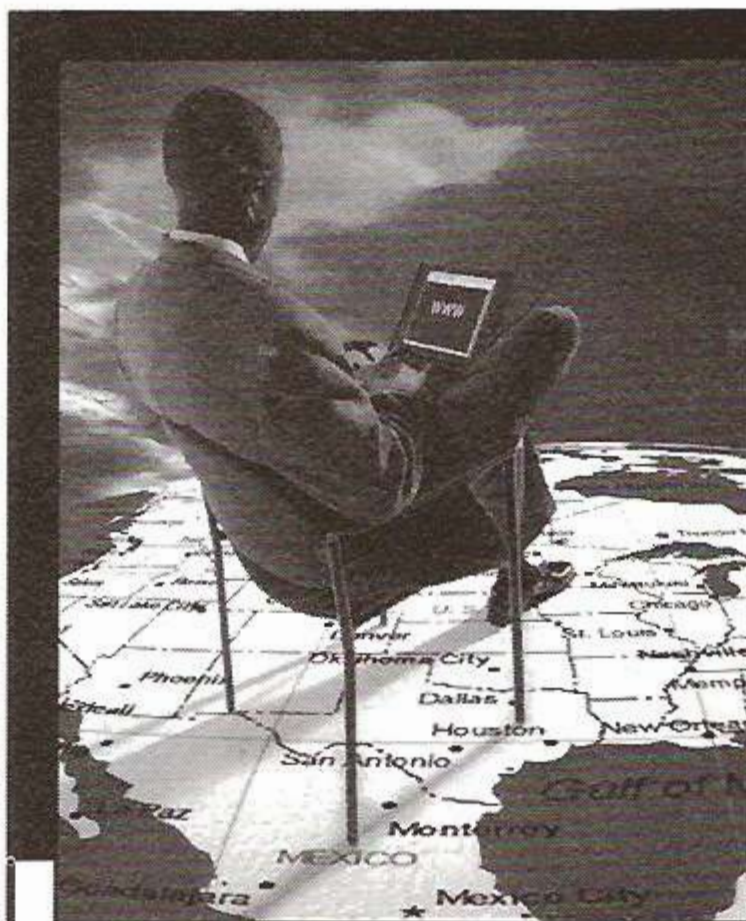
But D'Johns is looking past college acceptance, and focusing on the rigorous coursework she will encounter once she gets there. She believes the AP courses helped her do that.

"It's not all about passing the test," she says. "I felt like I really learned something. I think it will still help for college." ■

1998 Population		AP - 2000 MEAN GRADE	
Total	Black %	Total	Black
4,351,999	26.0	2.93	1.95
32,666,550	7.5	3.02	2.23
523,124	62.3	3.33	2.05
14,915,980	15.2	2.86	2.15
7,642,207	28.5	2.89	1.99
11,209,493	11.5	3.26	2.12
3,936,499	7.2	2.66	2.1
4,368,967	32.2	3.02	2.28
5,134,808	27.8	3.22	2.36
6,147,132	6.4	3.33	2.72
2,752,092	36.5	2.48	1.7
8,115,011	14.6	3.24	2.34
1,736,931	2.6	2.73	2.14
18,175,301	17.7	3.05	2.23
7,546,493	22.1	2.82	2.02
12,045,326	15.3	3.08	2.17
12,001,451	9.7	3.08	2.37
3,835,962	29.9	2.81	1.92
5,430,621	16.6	3.07	2.15
6,791,345	20.1	2.98	2.29
275,874,186		3.01	2.17

*Refers to students claiming mixed ethnicity

SOURCE: THE COLLEGE BOARD, THE U.S. CENSUS



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