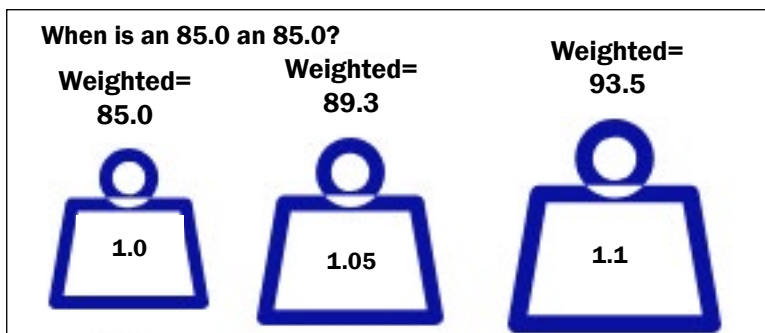


When a “B” Becomes an “A”: How Many Schools Weight Their Advanced Placement Courses?

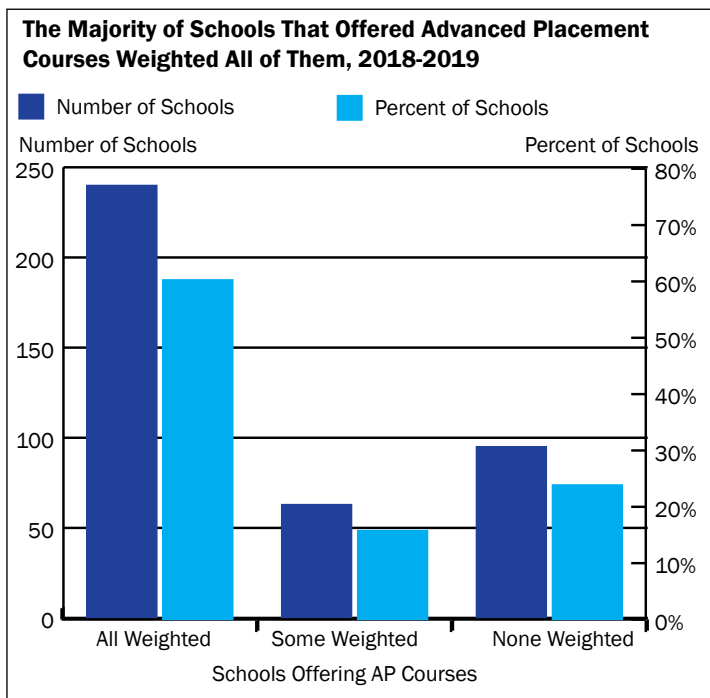
While content can vary across schools for most classes, advanced placement (AP) courses must cover specific content and skills required for college credit and must be approved by the College Board. Given the greater uniformity in curricula, one might expect consistency in grading advanced placement courses from school to school. But New York City public school students enrolled in advanced placement courses can at some schools earn bonus points towards their overall grade average through a process called weighting.

The Department of Education allows individual schools to decide whether to assign weights to advanced placement, honors, and other high-level courses. As a result, when two students from different schools take an AP course, the impact of the course on the first student’s grade point average (GPA) may differ from its impact on the second student’s GPA—even when the two students took the exact same advanced placement course and received the same grade.¹ In the 2018-2019 school year, schools assigned weights of 1.0 (no weight), 1.05, or 1.1 to their advanced placement courses.

When schools don’t weight their AP courses, an 85.0 remains an 85.0. In schools that weight their AP courses by 1.1, an 85.0 becomes a 93.5.



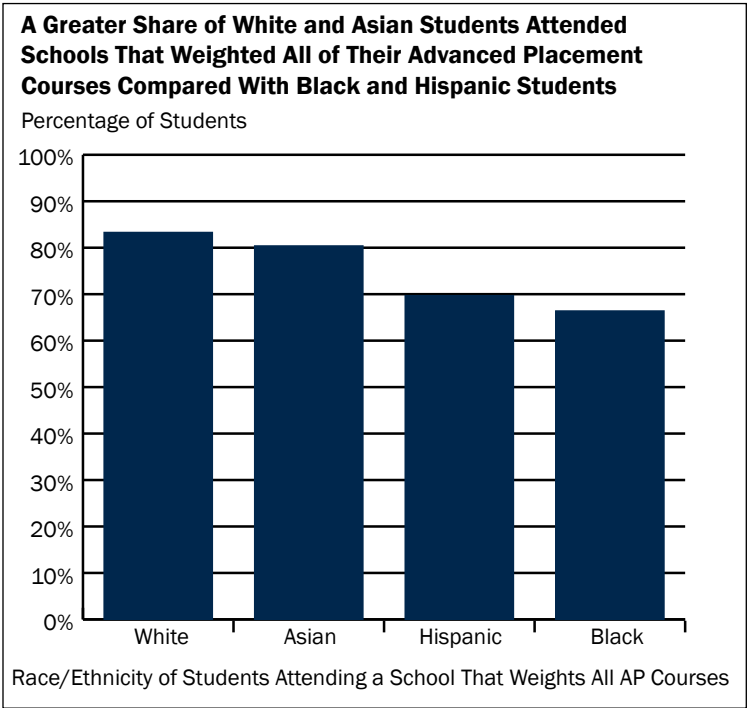
IBO looked at course data from school year 2018-2019 to determine whether there were differences in weighting across schools serving students in grades 9-12 and how those differences affected students from various demographic groups.



- Among the 398 schools that offered advanced placement courses, 60.3 percent weighted all of their advanced placement courses, 15.8 percent of schools weighted some of these courses, and 23.9 percent of schools weighted none.
- Only one of the 36 advanced placement courses offered at multiple schools—Physics C: Electricity and Magnetism—had the same weight across all schools.²
- AP Biology provides one example of a course that is weighted differently at different schools. Among the 149 schools that offer AP Biology, 108 schools gave a weight of 1.1 to the actual grade, 9 schools gave a weight of 1.05, and 32 schools gave no weight.
- A complete list of all advanced placement courses and the number of schools that assigned weights to each course is available [here](#).

IBO also analyzed whether there were demographic differences for students enrolled in schools serving students in grades 9-12 that weighted all, some, or none of their advanced placement courses. Looking at the sample of students who attended a school in 2018-2019 that offered advanced placement courses, we examined whether particular student groups were more likely to attend a school that weights all of these courses.

- Racial differences remained even when accounting for the student’s poverty, disability, and English learner status. White and Asian students were more likely than Black and Hispanic students to attend a school that weights all of their advanced placement courses.
- When accounting for these factors, Asian students were generally more likely than students from other groups to attend a school that weights all of their advanced placement courses. One exception was when students were poor and not English learners—in that case, white students were more likely than Asian students to attend a school that weights all of their advanced placement courses.
- The largest difference was found between Asian and Black students. Specifically, Asian students who were poor and English learners were 5.4 times more likely to attend a school that weights all of their advanced placement courses than Black students with similar demographic characteristics.



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SOURCE: IBO analysis of Department of Education data

Endnotes

¹GPA's appear on students' transcripts as a "Cumulative Average," which is used for college admission, scholarship, and related purposes. For more details, see <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/docs/default-source/default-document-library/how-to-read-a-transcript>

²IBO only compared the 36 advanced placement courses that were offered at more than one school. Two advanced placement courses: AP German and Culture, and AP Studio Art: 3-D Design Portfolio were offered at one school each, and thus they do not have a comparison school.