

June 5, 2018

Event: Joint Committee on Student Success
Presenter: Camille Schuler, Ed.D.
Topic: AP Spanish Language for Spanish Heritage Students

My name is Camille Schuler, and I teach senior English and AP English Literature at South Medford High School. Tonight, I want to address the success we are experiencing at South as we work to close the achievement gap for our Spanish Heritage students and increase their college and career-readiness.

Two years ago, I began research for my doctoral thesis on this topic and found schools across the country that were offering AP Spanish Language classes for Spanish-speaking students as a means to accomplish the above goals. I approached Dr. Shumate and our school administrators with this research, and they agreed with my suggestion to pilot an AP Spanish Language class for Heritage Students at South. Below, I've listed some of the success we have seen so far since we began the program, and this comes from a survey I conducted last May and individual interviews I conducted as part of my doctoral research this year.

- 1) After experiencing success in their first AP class, all students reported feeling more open to trying another AP course.
- 2) Students who took the AP exam received advanced scores of 4s and 5s, so that those who had never thought of going to college before, now believed they could be successful and complete a 4-year degree, not just in Spanish but in any subject they chose to study.
- 3) Students experienced what it was like to be instructed at a pace and level of fluency equal to their abilities without having to navigate through the nuances of a second language that sometimes obscures their learning.
- 4) After experiencing the rigor and success of the AP course, students who had never thought of themselves as smart or intelligent got a sense of what that might feel like. AP Spanish for Heritage Speakers has become a way to support our underserved and overlooked Latino students.

Last month, when I defended my dissertation, I shared this quote from one of our students:

When I took [AP Spanish], I realized for the first time, this must be what it's like to speak English and learn English and really understand what the teacher is saying. For the first time, I felt like an American in a classroom, being pushed in my own language.

Some may think that AP Spanish is an easy A for kids who are fluent in Spanish. To that I say that none of my AP students think that AP English is an easy A just because they speak English. Others may be concerned that by limiting AP Spanish to Heritage speakers, that we are closing off opportunities for our native-English speakers. To that I say English-speaking students have the option of taking any of 17 other AP classes; these students have only one.

If schools in Oregon would follow the model we have at South, then Oregon could become one of the leaders in closing that achievement gap and improving the college and career-readiness for this growing and dynamic population.

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