

## ***News from the Stamford Public Schools***

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### **State Arbitrators Affirm Value of Program to Increase Student Access to Advanced Placement Courses**

In a case being watched by school districts across Connecticut, a State Department of Education (SDOE) Arbitration Panel has ruled that Westhill High School teachers may receive grant-funded bonus pay for students who receive high grades on Advanced Placement (AP) courses.

Last year, Westhill was selected as one of nine high schools in Connecticut for participation in Project Opening Doors (POD) through a five year, \$594,000 grant. The grant covers increased teacher training, extra resources, additional student preparation, and bonuses of \$1,000 – \$3,000 for teachers whose students meet specific performance criteria on AP exams. The primary goal of POD is to increase the number of students scoring 3 or higher on AP mathematics, science, and English exams. It also aims to increase access to AP courses among those high school students who have traditionally not enrolled in college-level courses. There are currently 280 Westhill High School students enrolled in 22 AP courses. AP exams will be administered in May 2009, with results expected in late summer 2009.

“This is a great decision that reinforces our efforts to prepare each and every student for higher education and success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” said Superintendent of Schools Dr. Joshua Starr. “I am thankful for the support Project Opening Doors is providing to help more students take college-level courses.”

POD is modeled after a program created in Dallas, Texas. Results show that in the schools that are served, the number of students scoring 3 or higher on AP English exams has tripled, the number of students scoring 3 or higher on AP mathematics exams has quadrupled, and the number of students scoring 3 or higher on AP science exams has quintupled. For the 2008-2009 school year, the number of Westhill students

achieving 3 or higher on all AP exams is projected to increase from 225 to 355. By the fifth year of POD, the total number of students achieving 3 or higher is projected to increase to 520, more than twice the number of students who attained this score prior to the initiative.

According to Westhill Principal Camille Figluizzi, “The POD grant enables us to continue the work of giving all of our students the opportunity to take the highest level courses our school has to offer. The resources the grant brings us are invaluable to our mission.”

The POD initiative resulted in arbitration after the Stamford Education Association contended that the bonus aspect amounted to merit pay, which the organization opposed. In its decision released this week, the SDOE Arbitration panel concluded that “The record is replete with testimony concerning the professional, dedicated, committed nature of the teachers at Westhill. It is clear to the panel that this group of teachers is a well-respected one which cares deeply about the future successes and achievements of their students and will do “whatever it takes”... to achieve the goals of the Program. The panel believes that these teachers put forth their best efforts on a daily basis and will continue to do so whether the potential to earn a “bonus” exists or not.”

The outcome of this case was being followed by other Connecticut school districts and high schools that are also participating in POD: Ansonia, Coventry, Putnam, New Britain, Waterbury, East Hartford, New London, and Buckley High School in Hartford.

AP courses are offered at all three of Stamford’s public high schools. Stamford High and the Academy of Information Technology & Engineering will have the opportunity to apply for a POD grant for 2009-2010.

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