

Prepared Testimony

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for the invitation to speak with you this morning.

The Advanced Programs Initiative is New Mexico's statewide educational foundation. Our mission is to ensure that all New Mexican students are prepared with the advanced knowledge and skills they need to earn high school and college degrees. We reach this goal by working at the district

level, hand-in-hand with public school leaders and teachers, to promote proven practices that we know work to improve student achievement.

Why is the emphasis on completion important? Because diplomas matter. In today's recession, the unemployment rate for those without a high-school degree is 12.6%, but for those with a bachelor's degree it is only 4.2%.¹ Among young workers just entering the workforce, the unemployment rate for those without a high school diploma is 33%.² At the same time, the latest ACT college-entrance exam data show that *only 25 percent* of 2011 high school graduates possessed the competencies in math and English to be successful in college.³

On almost every measure of expected quality of life from poverty to academic performance, New Mexico's children fall woefully short. The following few facts illustrate the scope of the problem:

- According to the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), New Mexico's reading and math scores for 4th and 8th grade students are in the bottom decile of all states.
- The 2011 "Quality Counts" report ranks New Mexico 50th in students' "Chance for Success," and 47th in K-12 achievement.

Although just starting its third year of operation, API already is collaborating with a dozen public school districts in New Mexico to implement changes in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Together these districts represent more than one-half of all students in the state.

One of the solutions that API is promoting in the districts is the College Board's Advanced Placement program. Advanced Placement, sponsored since 1955 by the College Board, was designed to make students more productive in college by exposing them to nationally developed and nationally sanctioned college-level courses and exams while still in high school. Since then it has become one of the best, and best-known, examples of a best-practice instructional program.

Research has demonstrated the impact of AP. Students who participate in AP, whether or not they earn a qualifying score (an AP grade of 3 or better) on the exam, no matter their income or ethnicity, have a significantly greater chance of graduating from college than students who have not taken an AP course. This research also tells us that students who do earn qualifying scores on AP exams are three times more likely to earn a college degree than students who score below 3 on the exam.

The proof of AP's value is not just in the numbers, but in the design of the program itself, and it is for these reasons that API has made Advanced Placement teaching and learning a centerpiece of its investing in New Mexico public schools.

Half a century ahead of its time, Advanced Placement was emphasizing the things that we now know are most critical to student success, and that, as a result, are represented in the new Common Core curriculum being adopted in our nation's public schools.

According to Adelman’s seminal research⁴ on student achievement, “academic intensity” in the high school curriculum “matters most” to students’ success in college, and this is particularly true for minority students. Students who participate in rigorous courses in high school gain improved confidence, study discipline, and complex speaking, writing and reasoning skills. These are the same traits we are now requiring of *all U.S. students* with the Common Core State Standards.⁵

AP provides evidence of how to prepare teachers to teach advanced curriculum to all students, which in today’s world is what *all teachers* must do. Like the Common Core, AP emphasizes:

- (1) Teacher excellence in the *process* of learning as well as subject-matter expertise, and offers high-quality professional development to reach that level of mastery;
- (2) Rigorous content and practice standards in the curriculum—which force students to reason, argue, write, and show evidence and are tied directly to performance expectations in college;
- (3) Assessments that are carefully and closely aligned with curriculum and instruction, and that, as a result, require students to demonstrate *understanding* of a topic, not just memorized facts.

Despite the success of Advanced Placement in many states, New Mexico trails the nation in the adoption and acceleration of AP coursework and teachers in its public schools. In high performing states like Maryland and New York, nearly a quarter of all high school students pass an Advanced Placement course with an exam grade of 3 or higher, well enough to qualify for college credit. New Mexico ranks in the bottom tier of states with 10

percent of high school seniors scoring a grade 3 or higher on an AP exam, compared to 17 percent for the nation. And while the College Board recognizes that New Mexico had the largest share of any state of Hispanic students who passed AP exams in 2011, this is at least partly attributable to the fact that New Mexico has the highest proportion of Hispanic students in its general school population and fewer exam-takers overall.

The API AP Fellows competitive grant program is intervening in the areas that research tells us will have the largest impact: teacher professionalism, teacher leadership and teacher time with students. We are committed to “growing up” great AP teachers who can succeed with diverse groups of students.

The AP Fellows are selected annually in a competitive application process to ensure that our goals for the program match the teachers’ teaching goals. First, we offer teachers direct classroom support, providing them professional development, additional time with their students and mentoring from master teachers for themselves and their students. They join a learning community of similarly-minded teachers. And we ensure that the AP exam fee (currently \$87 per course) is not a barrier to student participation by providing additional fee remission to that already offered in New Mexico with federal and state funds.

Second, following the approach pioneered by the Peter O’Donnell Foundation and used by the National Math and Science Initiative, we support students in math, science and English disciplines, because we believe those to be the skillsets most important to life success.

Third, we offer Fellows the opportunity to become master teachers, mentoring other teachers and becoming leaders in their districts.

And, finally, we look for teachers and school and district leaders who share our values and vigorously promote their efforts to strengthen school culture and expectations, especially among low-income and minority students and families.

New Mexico is one of the first majority-Hispanic states in the United States. Our students represent the future of the U.S. workforce. In 2011, 14 states⁶ had “closed the achievement gap” in AP for Hispanic students, meaning that the proportion of minority students participating in AP matched the proportion of those students in the school population, and just 7 states had eliminated the achievement gap for both Hispanic and Native American students.⁷ New Mexico was not among those states.

The districts in which API has begun its work, Albuquerque, Farmington, and Santa Fe, are diverse and representative of New Mexico itself. In Albuquerque Public Schools, for example, nearly 60 percent of students are Hispanic, and in our target school, West Mesa High School, 84 percent of students are Hispanic. In Farmington Municipal Schools, 30 percent of students are Native American. In Santa Fe Public Schools, 71 percent of students are low income. Sixty one (61) percent of students in our districts would be considered low-income.

The outcomes of the AP Fellows program are to improve both *participation* in AP courses and *success* on AP exams. In the past two academic years, we

have served 1,268 students and 25 teachers in 3 districts. Of these students, approximately 43 percent were Hispanic. In 2011 our Native American participation was only about 2.5 percent, but in 2012 Native American participation was 22 percent.

With our first-year results in summer 2011, we saw a 36 percent increase in the number of students passing AP exams, while the state's overall increase was 7.5 percent. In 2011, there was a 33 percent increase in the number of enrolled students who took the national exam—a critical indicator of student future success—and in 2012 more than 80% of students enrolled in our cohort are taking the AP exam. Results for 2012 will be available in July.

API is a young organization, and we must raise all the funds that we invest. So we've started small. But we are confident that our assumption is correct: that it is great teachers who have the subject-matter knowledge and teaching skills to teach all students—whether in AP or in the Common Core—who will improve academic proficiency and college readiness among our nation's underperforming students. This is a conclusion also reached by the authors of the *Rising Above the Gathering Storm*⁸ report of the National Academy of Sciences and the resultant *PACE (Protecting America's Competitive Edge) Act*, sponsored by members of this committee.⁹

If we are to scale-up the known benefits of the Advanced Placement program in New Mexico and elsewhere, we must expand the number of certified AP teachers, improve their effectiveness with all types of students, and make them leaders in the development of other teachers. The effects of our efforts will be scaled throughout the teacher corps by the recognition

among teacher and district leaders that the AP standard is the professional standard that all teachers must meet.

Endnotes

¹ *Bureau of Labor Statistics*, March 2012.

² *Understanding the Economy: Unemployment Among Young Workers*, U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee, Washington, DC, May 2010.

³ *2011 Condition of College and Career Readiness*, ACT, Iowa City, Iowa.

⁴ *Answers in the toolbox: Academic intensity, attendance patterns, and bachelor's degree attainment*, Clifford Adelman, Washington, DC, U.S. Department of Education, 1999.

⁵ New Mexico and 45 other states have adopted Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for public schools, establishing new guidelines for student learning that are internationally competitive. The CCSS represent a very different approach to teaching, learning, and assessment—one focusing on fewer but more rigorous standards, and fostering a deeper understanding of critical concepts and the practical applications of knowledge. Developed over many years, tested, and proven to be effective, these new learning standards draw on research on how students learn and how best to prepare them for college and the increasingly competitive job market.

⁶ States that have eliminated the Achievement Gap in AP among Hispanic students, according to the College Board's *AP Report to the Nation* (2011) are: District of Columbia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Dakota, Florida, Alaska, Maryland, Arkansas, South Dakota, Georgia, Virginia, Kentucky, Alabama, Ohio.

⁷ States that have eliminated the Achievement Gap in AP among both Hispanic and Native American students are: Mississippi, Maryland, Arkansas, Georgia, Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio (College Board, 2011).

⁸ *Rising Above the Gathering Storm*, The National Academies Press, Washington, DC, 2005.

⁹ *Protecting America's Competitive Edge Act*—S. 2197, 2198 and 2199—was introduced by U.S. Senators Lamar Alexander, Jeff Bingaman, Pete Domenici, and Barbara Mikulski. It called to increase federal funding for science and education programs. The legislation stemmed from the *Rising Above the Gathering Storm* report, outlining a plan to ensure U.S. economic competitiveness with the rest of the world, that was requested by Senators Bingaman and Alexander.

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