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More students taking AP courses

By **Tanner Kent**
The Free Press

MANKATO August 28, 2008 10:08 pm

— While federal legislation puts much of the emphasis on students who are struggling academically, a new state report shows that students who are succeeding aren't getting left behind either. According to the Minnesota Department of Education, the number of students who took — and passed — Advanced Placement courses rose significantly in 2007-08. The state department is reporting that the number of students who took AP exams — the end-of-year test that determines whether a student earns college credit — as well as the total number of exams taken rose about 6 percent. But even more telling is the 8 percent rise in the number of students who passed those exams. In a news release, MDE Commissioner Alice Seagren said “the increase in Advanced Placement scores once again shows that as we raise academic expectations, Minnesota students will rise to meet those expectations.” In Mankato, demand from students and teachers has led the district to offer about a dozen AP courses at one or both of its high schools. Mankato Area Public Schools also offer post-secondary enrollment options through Project Lead the Way's engineering curriculum, ProStart's culinary curriculum and the district's nursing certification program through South Central College. AP course offerings depend on teacher availability and student interest, but generally include disciplines such as psychology, chemistry, physics, calculus, history, literature and language composition. Guidance counselors help students choose the right post-secondary enrollment option and provide assistance with scheduling and registration. “As we look at the best ways to meet the needs of all students,” said Cindy Amoroso, district curriculum director, “it's important to think broadly about the opportunities we can provide.” Amoroso said costs for AP classes are relatively small and include only the cost of outside training and additional classroom materials for the teacher. And while such costs are generally much lower than those for other post-secondary enrollment options, financial considerations and low student interest do prevent some school districts from offering advanced coursework. Project SOCRATES addresses those challenges by providing Internet access and multimedia opportunities to a wide variety of public institutions, including 27 area school districts and dozens of local libraries. Through SOCRATES, students in outstate and rural school districts can access advanced courses in nearly every subject through online and Internet-TV classes. In addition, said SOCRATES director Dale Carrison, students can also access concurrent enrollment programs and hard-to-find electives like Mandarin Chinese. “We do all of the above,” Carrison said. “Practically any curriculum area in which a student needs an elective, a class for credit recovery or a class for college entrance, we can offer that for them.”

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