



# Growing Pains in the Advanced Placement Program: Do Tough Trade-offs Lie Ahead?

Please select the correct answer to the following statement:

More students are taking part in the Advanced Placement program.

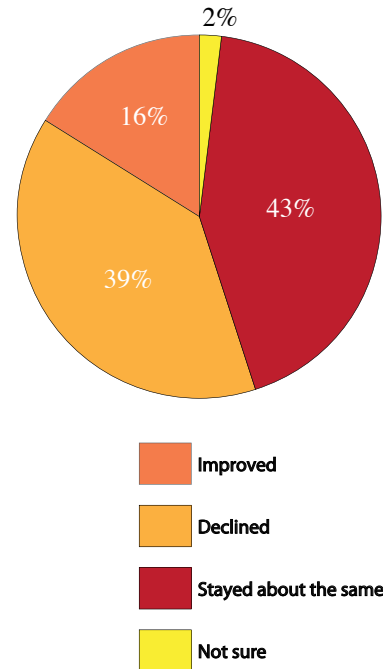
- a) True
- b) False

True! In 2002-2003, 1 million students participated in AP by taking at least one exam. Five years later, nearly 1.6 million did—a 50+ percent increase.\*

But is growth all good? Might there be a downside? Are ill-prepared students eroding the quality of the program? Perhaps harming the best and brightest? To find out, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute commissioned the Farkas Duffett Research Group to survey AP teachers in public high schools across the country (about 1000 teachers responded).

Perhaps not surprisingly, the AP program remains very popular with its teachers. But there are signs that the move toward “open door” access to AP is starting to cause concern. We should pay careful attention to these anxieties as the program continues to evolve.

Has the quality of your AP students in terms of their aptitude and capacity to do the work.....



## KEY FINDINGS

- Sixty-five percents of teachers say the number of students taking AP classes at their high school has grown in the past five years.
- Sixty-nine percent of teachers say their high school’s AP classes are generally open to any student who wants to take them; only 29% say there are limits on access.
- Many teachers are concerned about this open-door policy. The majority (52%) says it’s best to allow only those students deemed able to handle the material into AP classes. More than six in ten (63%) believe that more screening to ensure that students are ready for AP-level work would improve the program.
- Still, teachers are mostly satisfied with the overall quality of the AP program. More than 3 in 4 rate their own school’s program as good or excellent; 59% say the difficulty level of the material has stayed about the same; 27% say it has become more challenging.

\*The College Board. *Annual AP Program Participation 1956-2008*. Numbers may be slightly inflated because some students take AP exams in more than one year.