

PW-S district earns national AP recognition

Written by BILL SCHANEN IV
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Award cites PWHS program that helps growing number of students earn college credits

The Port Washington-Saukville School District has received national recognition for an advanced placement program that is giving more students than ever a chance to earn college credits in high school.

The district is one of 539 school systems in the United States and Canada named to the AP District Honor Roll, the College Board, which administers the advanced placement system, announced Monday.

That puts Port Washington High School's advanced placement program in the top echelon of AP programs in the nation. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, there are 16,025 public school districts in the United States alone.

Twenty-five other districts in Wisconsin were named to the honor roll. The Cedarburg School District is the only other one in Ozaukee County on the list.

"Success isn't accidental," Port Washington High School Principal Eric Burke told the School Board Monday. "We're very proud of this honor, and it goes back to the teachers, students and parents in this district."

The recognition is based on two factors — increasing student access to advanced placement courses and the percentage of students who earn a score of 3 or higher on AP exams.

The AP program prepares students for post-high school education with college-level courses and allows them to earn credits credit at most colleges by scoring at least 3 out of 5 points on AP exams.

It is not uncommon, administrators said, to have at least one Port High student graduate with sophomore standing in college because of AP coursework.

The AP Honor Roll recognition is based on the last three years of districts' advanced placement testing. During that time, the number of Port High students who took AP exams increased from 226 to 295.

The percentage of students who scored 3 or higher on the exams has increased from 78% in 2010 to 85% in 2012. The school's mean exam score is 3.3.

The school offers AP courses in 14 subject areas.

Port High is being recognized for striking a balance between student participation in the AP program and test scores, which is not the case in all school districts, administrators said. Some high schools, mindful that AP test scores are one of the measures by which schools are

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compared, only encourage their highest achieving students to take AP exams.

“Could our test scores be higher if we didn’t encourage all students to participate in AP classes? Probably,” Burke said.

“But we want all of students to have the opportunity to prepare themselves for college and earn college credits at Port High.”

Burke credited teachers and counselors with encouraging students to take AP courses and exams.

Chris Surfus, the district’s curriculum coordinator, said Port High’s AP program is also successful because the district provides funding to train AP instructors, which is not the norm.

“This is a pretty remarkable honor for our program,” Supt. Michael Weber said.

“One of the truest measures of whether you’re connecting the curriculum with students are advanced placement scores and, of course, the end result is having your students go to college with credits.”