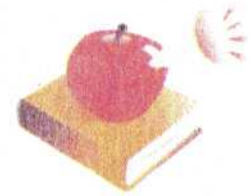


TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2007

LEARNING IS HER JOB

Student discovers pitfalls of juggling school, part-time work. L-2



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More minorities taking AP classes

By **MONSY ALVARADO**
STAFF WRITER

In Hackensack, enrollment reflects racial diversity

HACKENSACK — More African-American and Hispanic students are taking Advanced Placement courses at the city's high school — closely matching the diversity of the school population for the first time.

And school officials hope to entice more students into the program by agreeing to pick up the \$83 cost for each AP exam taken in May.

Of the 309 high school students tak-

ing the college-level courses this year, 36 percent are white, 26 percent are black and 38 percent are Hispanic, according to figures released at the College Board's Middle State Region conference in Baltimore last week.

Those numbers have improved dramatically since the 2002-03 school year — when 75 percent of the students taking the advanced classes were white,

while just 5 percent were black and 20 percent were Hispanic.

"The bottom line is that there has been a population growth in the Advanced Placement classes," said Principal Mark Porto, who attended the conference and was a speaker. "We are serious about our reforms to get kids to take college-level courses."

The high school, which serves

teenagers from Hackensack, South Hackensack, Rochelle Park and Maywood, has 1,855 students who are 31 percent white, 32 percent black and 37 percent Hispanic.

The school has been classified as being in "need of improvement" for not reaching benchmarks under the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

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Hackensack High School

Enrollment

School population:	1,855
White:	31%
Black:	32%
Hispanic:	37%

AP enrollment

	2002-03	2006-07
White	75%	36%
Black	5%	26%
Hispanic	20%	38%

Source: Hackensack High School

EDUCATION

Courses

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In the past few years, high school officials have eliminated tracking, which placed higher-achieving students in college-level courses while putting others in easier math and science classes.

Now, the district allows pupils who are not in the top 3 percent of their class, but who have good attendance and grades, to take AP classes as long as they show a desire to work hard in the course, officials said.

Officials are also crediting their six-week summer institute, which prepares students for

more rigorous courses in September, as another reason for the shift.

Last summer, students looking to get ahead and earn additional high school credit took classes in geometry, algebra, pre-calculus and biology.

"We want to promote equity in the Advanced Placement courses, but a critical component is providing them support," said Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Michael Wojcik. "Our support mechanisms are found in our tutoring programs."

Superintendent Joseph Montesano said underwriting the cost of the AP exams is worth it if it entices more students to take the courses and exams. The dis-

trict, which could spend approximately \$50,000, will use about \$28,000 in federal grants to pay for the exams, with the remainder coming from other money set aside to improve the high school's standardized test scores.

This month, the College Board, which runs the AP programs, released a study that showed that the number of New Jersey students taking AP courses rose to 23.5 percent in 2006, from 17.9 percent in 2000.

The report also indicated that African-Americans and Hispanics represented 14.8 percent and 14.1 percent, respectively, of the Garden State's student population. However, blacks and Hispanics represented just 5.5 percent and 9.3 percent of the Ad-

vanced Placement examinees.

The study also showed that even though more minorities are enrolling in the AP courses nationwide, poor exam results indicate that teachers and students often are not receiving adequate preparation.

As a result, traditionally underrepresented students, including Hispanics and African-Americans, have demonstrated lower scores on the exam.

In Hackensack, the scores on the AP exams have declined since the 2003-04 school year, officials said. Back then, 99 percent of tests taken received a grade of 2 or better. Last year it was at 82 percent.

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