



Milford High School Biology teacher Ken Outten gets students ready for the day's lesson. Photo by Thomas Nutter Photography.

Quest for the Best

Students achieve more through Advanced Placement coursework

BY SARAH BRAATZ

IN 2012, Milford High School administrators were looking for a diverse group of older students to speak to their younger peers about the importance of taking advanced classes. However, they could not find one. In fact, they saw that only 90 students in a school of approximately 1,000 were enrolled in AP classes. From this startling realization, the Will to Skill Program was born.

Prior to 2012, students could not take AP classes unless they had been enrolled in honors courses in middle school. If students ever earned below a C, no matter any extenuating circumstances, they were disqualified from taking upper level classes into the future. This led to dwindling numbers of students in these courses as students reached junior and senior year.

The goal of the Will to Skill program is twofold: increase advanced course placement (honors, AP, and dual enrollment) and improve performance in those classes. While it is generally the case that increased enrollment leads to lower average scores, in creating the program,

Milford staff believed that it was possible to achieve both. This goal guided them to design a program that removed barriers to taking advanced classes and to provide no-cost tutoring for students who were struggling.

A key component to ensuring the success of the program was having buy-in from staff and students. The motto of the program, "if you have the will, we will provide the skill," speaks to the responsibilities of both parties. Students must want to learn and staff has to provide support. The results of the program go far beyond what anyone would have predicted.

Since the program was started, AP course enrollment grew 240% to 306 students. Paired with this increase is a rise in AP Exam pass rates. The percentage of students who got a 3 or higher rose from 44% to 61%, meaning Milford is well above the national average of 55%. Dual Enrollment Courses also saw a substantial jump in enrollment, growing 321% from 34 to 143 students.

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The statistics about the program speak for themselves. Yet, that doesn't stop Milford Principal Shawn Snyder from speaking about them. Snyder, who was invited to speak at The Passion behind the Power of the Principal Forum by CollegeBoard, touts the AP growth and pass rates as crowning achievements of the program. He is proud of the culture Will to Skill has woven into the day-to-day at Milford. He highlighted that "it's become a badge of honor to be seen carrying around an AP Bio textbook." Students' sense of prestige and honor from being enrolled in advanced courses has encouraged other students to push themselves and take higher level courses.

The Will to Skill Program has a lasting impact on the students who were provided access to a more rigorous high school education. Snyder hopes to see the program expand to ensure all Milford students who have the ability and desire to take advanced level courses have the means to do so. Efforts at Milford High School have provided motivated students a whole new set of opportunities to succeed. ■



Photo by Thomas Nutter Photography.



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We stand with you in your mission to empower students. Your continued commitment in the community we've called home for ten years is an inspiration to us all.

Thank you!

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