



One teacher can make all the difference

Irene Mahoney helps her AP students prepare for College Success

In a school district that serves largely under-represented populations of students, going from having only 4 qualifying Advanced Placement exam scores to 34 is something to celebrate. Even more remarkable is when one single teacher contributes to 15% of the state's qualifying biology exam scores by minority students. One teacher in a Gateway City that has historically struggled with academic success is making a difference every day.

“Advanced Placement and the foundation it provides young people will help strengthen America's success in the future.”

Irene Mahoney
AP Biology Teacher
Chelsea High School

Chelsea High School's Irene Mahoney has been helping her students succeed in science over the past six years as a partner with Mass Insight Education.

Teaching largely Hispanic students, Irene teaches them the skills to attain qualifying scores on the AP exams while putting them on the fast track to college. With high scores and shining transcripts as early as sophomore year, students whose low-income families never envisioned college as a possibility are now trying to decide which admissions offer to accept.

Mahoney has helped the number of minority students with qualifying scores skyrocket in the past year, teaching 26 of the 173 minority students with qualifying biology scores in Massachusetts.

As a part of Mass Insight Education's AP/STEM program, Mahoney has been trained to teach AP courses to a wider range of students, as well as to recruit students who may not have considered enrolling. In addition, as part of her professional development, she comes together with hundreds of teachers from across the state and national teacher trainers to build a network of teaching support.

Mahoney credits Mass Insight's program for her creating “lasting connections with amazing AP biology teachers all over

the state” and “having the ability to share ideas, labs and activities” to make her class “more dynamic and engaging”

Her students excel early on in their high school careers, making them sought after by college recruiters. According to Mahoney, the AP courses also provide the academic rigor that prepares them for college-level work when they arrive on campus, which leads to college success.

Out of the 46 qualifying scores by sophomores, 22 were in Mahoney's class representing 47.8% of the Massachusetts total. With consistent scores like these as sophomores and juniors, these minority and low-income students are on the fast track to college, scholarships and career success as they enter the workforce.

As a result of its swift success, the Chelsea Public School District received the College Board Advanced Placement Equity and Excellence District of the Year award in the past for being the leading school in AP course enrollment and continuous successful outcomes.

It's a success Mahoney attributes to her students' determination. She believes that all students are capable of great work regardless of their background. And with the support of their teacher, her students prove it every day.

Irene Mahoney inspires her diverse AP biology students to reach higher

One student thanks her teacher for helping her succeed - speech transcript from Partners in Excellence Awards

By Rebeca Torrento - I thought I must be crazy when I considered my first Advanced Placement class. Why would I want to take a college-level course in the 10th grade?! But, being the audacious person that I am, I said "Why not?"

My introduction to AP was Biology. Hearing from the students who had already taken the course, I was a bit petrified. They told me it was a ton of work and I would never sleep again. Honors Biology was hard enough freshman year but, in the end it was all to get me more prepared for college. Coming from parents who never graduated high school, I've always wanted them to be proud of me, but I wasn't so confident that I was going to pass the AP exam. Studying the text could only get me so far, I needed that extra push from my teacher. Being able to be patient when 30 kids are asking you different questions is not an easy job, but she did it.

Biology isn't the easiest subject in the world, but I love to take on a challenge. Apart from taking 3 AP courses, I play on the Varsity Volleyball team, sing for Tri-M music Honor society, run and throw for Varsity Track and Field, volunteer with Interact club, debate for Mock trial, tutor other students for the peer tutoring program, act for Drama club and have been recently inducted as a member of the National Honor Society and elected as a delegate of the Student Advisory Council.

You're probably wondering when do I sleep right? Well the answer is simple: Never. But prioritizing was one of the main things that I learned, when I entered the world of AP. I learned how to manage my time and get all of my work done while still being able to enjoy the after school activities. I discovered that even I had to grow personally to handle all my obligations, teachers were gladly there to assist me, before or after school.

When I questioned how I earned a qualifying score, I think back to my teacher. Going over 55 chapters, in great detail so students can be prepared for the exam...is a challenge that would daunt me..but my teacher, Ms. Mahoney got it done and I can say not



AP teacher Irene Mahoney and her former AP Biology student Rebeca Torrento celebrate their achievements at Mass Insight's *Partners in Excellence Teacher Awards* at Boston's Museum of Science.

everybody can get 16 students to pass the AP Biology exam, but she did it. We passed the exam because she believed in every single one of her students, and she knew our capabilities, something that I believe every teacher should know.

After passing the AP exam, I realized the many things I had accomplished throughout the year. Prioritizing, getting everything turned in on time, and not procrastinating (as much). Things that would help later on in college. I can say I am one step closer to college than other students who have not taken an AP course. The joy you get when you pass the exam after all of the hard work you had done, and seeing the teacher proud of you is irreplaceable.

With my success from AP Biology, I decided to take 3 more AP classes because I knew that with the help of the teachers and my hard work, I would be successful.

After finishing the exam, thinking about how badly my hard hurt from so much writing, I also thought about how hard my teachers worked so that I could be confident in myself when I would be taking these tests. I think we really owe it to our teachers and mentors for taking that extra time, even if it

“I believe my **teacher** is part of the reason why I **passed** my AP exam.”

Rebeca Torrento, Class of 2015

was a Friday afternoon, to show us how much they really love their job and their students.

I want to thank Ms. Mahoney. Without her, I probably would have hated Biology and would have never taken another AP course. And thank you for showing me that Gel Electrophoresis lab. Who knew that I would have fallen in love with Forensic Science in an AP Biology class and found my college major?

And to all of the teachers here tonight, I think all of your students would want me to thank you, because let's face it, without our teachers we wouldn't be where we are today.