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## In Program Giving Cash, More Pass A.P. Tests

By [JENNIFER MEDINA](#)

A program that offers students up to \$1,000 for passing [Advanced Placement exams](#) has shown some success, with more students at 31 city high schools earning passing scores, according to officials in charge of the effort.

The program, called Reach, or [Rewarding Achievement](#), involves students at 26 public and 5 Catholic schools with large minority enrollments. The number of students passing A.P. exams at those schools rose this year to 1,240 from 1,161.

The number of tests taken at those schools — many students take tests in multiple subjects — increased by more than 800, to 5,436, and the number of passing grades by 302, to 1,774. The passing rate edged up slightly, to 33 percent from 32.

The program is one of several local and national experiments using financial incentives to raise student achievement. Another New York City program that pays students for doing well on standardized tests has been underway for two years, but the city has not announced any results.

Although such programs have proliferated in recent years, there has been little evidence of their effectiveness. The results of the privately funded \$2 million Reach program are scheduled to be announced Wednesday, and organizers say they are confident the results will help them secure more money.

In 2008, the first year of Reach, [the number of A.P. exams taken at the schools rose from the year before, but the number of passing scores — a 3 or above — actually declined](#). Passing Advanced Placement tests generally allows students to earn college credits during high school.

Edward Rodriguez, the executive director of Reach, attributed the improvement this year to a change that linked the size of the reward to students' attendance at Saturday tutoring sessions, where they worked with teachers who had graded Advanced Placement exams in the past.

Students who attended the weekend classes and ultimately received a 5, the highest score, would receive \$1,000, while students who did not attend the tutorials and received a score of 5 were awarded \$500. Students who earned 4's received \$750 if they attended the sessions and \$400 if they did not.

"We saw much better results from kids who did attend the program, so we know it was not just that these are kids who were most motivated to start with," Mr. Rodriguez said. "We know it really taught them something and helped to be an environment where everyone else was trying to get the same result."

The program awarded a total of \$825,000 this year. A student from Flushing High School in Queens earned

\$3,250 for passing four tests.

The results at individual schools varied widely. At Frederick Douglass Academy in Harlem, students took 30 more exams this year than last year, and the pass rate increased by 13 percentage points, to 72 percent. (Nationally, the overall pass rate was 57 percent.) But at Newtown High School in Flushing, students took just 96 tests, compared to 116 in 2007 and the pass rate dropped to 33 percent, compared to 47 percent last year.

[Sol Stern](#), a fellow at the conservative Manhattan Institute who has been critical of cash programs, questioned whether the incentives simply helped students learn test-taking skills.

“I am very skeptical of using this money simply to create more of that,” he said.

[Whitney Tilson](#), who helped create Reach and is on the boards of both Pershing Square Foundation, the program’s major underwriter, and the [Council of Urban Professionals](#), which runs the program, said that he is “thrilled” that the number of students taking the tests has increased.

“We want to expand and democratize Advanced Placement so that more students try to take these courses,” he said. “If we do that, it will be worth the money.”

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