

SB478  
AGATE Testimony  
Concerns about the Bill

Thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns about this bill. We are not opposing the bill but as Advocates for Gifted and Talented and Advanced Placement students across the state, we are compelled to share these concerns about this bill with you.

The initial generation of this bill was passed in 2017 and became Act 1118 and Act 745. In 2017 we inquired about the purpose of the bill, since it added a level of flexibility in training of Advanced Placement teachers that had never been considered since the passing of Act 2154 of 2005. The stipulation of Act 2154 was that if students were to receive weighted credit for their AP course, their Advanced Placement teachers were required to attend an Advanced Placement Summer Institute (APSI) training once every five years. The APSI was endorsed by the College Board, consisted of 30 hours over four days of training and featured College Board consultants, who had already demonstrated success as Advanced Placement teachers. The three sites were set up at UA Little Rock, the U of A in Fayetteville, and Arkansas State University in Jonesboro. Over the past 14 years, thousands of Arkansas high school and middle school teachers have been trained and the APSI is still considered the most comprehensive AP or Pre-AP training a teacher can receive in Arkansas. The AP Incentive Act of 1997 established initial funding for teacher training and is still funding that training today. As a GT and AP director in Pulaski County, I never paid for an average of 20-30 teachers each year to attend an APSI, thanks to the funding your predecessors provided in 1997 and you continue to provide today.

The ADE responded to our question that the addition of the line **“College Board endorsed training at intervals recommended by the College Board”** was strictly to allow flexibility for the AP Computer Science course. Last year, while the ADE was creating the rules and regulations for Act 1119 and Act 745, we submitted questions through public comments because we knew that the College Board did not recommend intervals for training. We also noted that if the addition was strictly for the AP Computer Science course, why did it not mention the course? We never received the promised written response to our questions from ADE legal, and when we inquired about it, we were told that ADE had decided to re-write the law again and we would have the opportunity to review it before it was filed.

As promised, the ADE provided us a draft copy of SB478 as it was being developed and we discovered that the previous line was replaced with two other options: **“(2) College Board-endorsed training; or (3) Other similarly rigorous training approved by the department; or”** which allows the ADE to approve something other than the Advanced Placement Summer Institutes for AP training.

The bill also states:

**“The State Board of Education shall: (A) Adopt appropriate equivalents for advanced placement and college courses; and shall (B) Recommend a uniform grading structure for honors courses”**

and later provides this process:

**“A local school district board of directors may adopt a policy to allow high school students in the school district to take college courses for weighted credit equal to the numeric grade awarded in advanced placement courses, courses offered under the program, and honors classes.”**

When the four AP courses were mandated for Arkansas schools, some administrators began to seek ways to avoid having to offer those courses, because, admittedly, it isn't easy to develop a quality AP program. AGATE has always supported Concurrent Credit courses and believes that they are the appropriate way for some students to get college credit while in high school. We applaud Senator Sturch's Concurrent Credit scholarship bill, and acknowledge him for finding an appropriate source of funds for it.

We also believe that for some students, Advanced Placement courses offer the most appropriate way for them to prepare for college and hopefully earn college credit. It is difficult to recruit students into AP courses because they are challenging and require a great deal of commitment and interest in that content. A student may take an AP course and not get the credit, but if a student passes the concurrent credit course, he or she will receive the credit. So why do students still take AP courses in the numbers they do? Because they have the opportunity and they know that if the teacher is properly trained and committed to the task, they will be prepared for college whether they make the obligatory grade on the exam or not.

If there still is an effort to replace AP with Concurrent Credit, this bill could enable that process to begin. If training for AP teachers is approved that is not at the level of an APSI, we are doing our AP students a grave injustice. If schools are allowed to systemically replace their AP courses with concurrent credit courses, their students will not have the opportunity to take the AP courses. That is why we asked the ADE to insert an amendment that would place the Office of GT and AP at the table for any decisions made regarding weighted credit and alternate trainings for AP teachers. The ADE has worked with us throughout this process and when they assure us that there is no plan to replace AP with Concurrent Credit, we believe them. When the ADE said that rather than put the amendment into the bill, they would include us in the rules and regulations, we accepted that because we trust them. We also have been around through numerous changes in ADE staff over time, and the present staff may not always be there to interpret the rules with the insight gained from past experiences, so we are compelled to share our concerns with you in an effort to protect the future of GT and AP.

If, however, there is still a desire to replace AP with Concurrent Credit, we urge you to consider whether the potential outcomes of such a change are truly in the best interests of the students of our state. We believe that Arkansas Schools are better with both and we look forward to working with the ADE to provide appropriate learning opportunities for all our students, regardless of their level of preparation and ability.

Thank you for allowing us to share these concerns with you.

Christine Deitz, President AGATE  
Davis Hendricks, AGATE Advocate