

Open DOORS

Talking to Students About AP



Why this conversation matters

Students often decide whether to try, or stay in, an AP® class based on one conversation with an adult they trust, not a school assembly or a flyer they read. You don't need to know the details of AP to be that person. You just need a few honest things to say and to know when to refer them to their teacher or school counselor.

How to have the conversation

When	Any moment it comes up naturally: a passing comment, a bad grade, "I'm thinking about dropping my AP class," or a first-time student who seems unsure.
How to open.	Start with a question, not a pitch. "How's that class going?" tells you more than any talking point.
Tone	Encourage, don't persuade. If a student feels pushed, it backfires. Listen first, then offer one of the messages below.
Keep it short	One genuine, short conversation lands better than a full explanation of how AP works.
Always close with	A next step: their teacher or school counselor. That's who can talk through credit, workload, supports, or next-step options.

If a student is hesitant to try their first AP class

AP is for more students than they think.

SAY THIS: "You don't need perfect grades to try AP. You just need to be willing to work at it."

Why it works: Framing AP as accessible, not exclusive, lowers the barrier for a student who has ruled themselves out.

Taking just one class makes a difference.

SAY THIS: "You don't have to load up on AP classes. Taking even one and giving it a real shot can make a real difference for what comes next."

Why it works: Research on AP outcomes shows the biggest gains come from a student's first AP course, not from taking many. One is a meaningful, achievable goal.

It's supposed to feel challenging.

SAY THIS: "If it feels hard, that means it's working. Your teacher, your counselor, and I are here to help you stick with it."

Why it works: Naming the challenge up front normalizes it so the first hard assignment doesn't feel like a sign they don't belong.



If a student already in AP wants to drop the class

The goal in these conversations is to help the student stay if there's a way to make it work. These messages address the reasons students usually want out and point them toward support before they decide to leave.

One hard week isn't the whole class.

SAY THIS: "A rough test or a hard week doesn't tell you how the rest of the class will go. Have you talked to your teacher about what's been hard?"

Why it works: Students often decide to drop in a moment of frustration. Separating the bad week from the whole course opens room to reconsider.

Struggling doesn't mean they don't belong.

SAY THIS: "Finding this hard doesn't mean you made a mistake taking it. It means you're being challenged, which is the point."

Why it works: Students who are struggling academically often internalize it as a sign they don't belong. Naming that gap directly helps them separate difficulty from doubt.

There may be more help available than they've tried.

SAY THIS: "Before you decide, let's see what's in AP Classroom. There are short videos and extra practice for exactly the topics you're stuck on, and that might change things."

Why it works: Students often don't realize built-in supports exist. Naming a specific, low-effort resource, like AP Classroom's AP Daily videos and practice questions, gives them something concrete to try before giving up the class.

They've already made it through the hardest part.

SAY THIS: "The start of a new class is usually the toughest stretch, and you've already gotten through a lot of it. Let's talk to your teacher about what could make the rest easier before you decide to leave."

Why it works: Students underestimate how much of the adjustment is already behind them. Reframing the effort as progress, not wasted time, makes staying feel more worthwhile than starting over somewhere else.

Remember your role

You're not expected to explain how AP works, resolve a grade dispute, or make the final call on whether a student stays enrolled. Your job is to encourage the student and refer them to resources available at their school.