

Equity and Access in AP®

Despite high college aspirations, many high school students do not enter or complete college. In EXCEerator™ partner districts, up to 90% of high school students report plans to attend college. Nationwide, two out of three ninth-graders report plans to enroll in college.¹ Even though most high school students plan to attend college, many do not achieve their college goals. Out of every 100 ninth-graders that enter high school, 44 will go to college and 21 will finish a bachelor's degree.²

The most important predictor of college success is an academically rigorous high school experience.³ Rigorous course work in elementary and middle school provides students with the foundation to complete college-level course work in high school. In many districts, the opportunity to develop college readiness is the Advanced Placement Program® (AP®). AP provides students with the option to complete college-level course work in high school and the preparation to succeed in college. Students who earn a score of 3 or higher on an AP Exam outperform non-AP students in college: they earn more credits, get higher grades, are more likely to return to college for a second year and are more likely to earn a degree.⁴

Even if all high school graduates do not choose to go on to college, all should leave high school college ready. EXCEerator defines college readiness as the level of preparation necessary to enroll and succeed — without remediation — in a credit-bearing general education course at a postsecondary institution.

What Is EXCEerator™?

The EXCEerator Group supports districts by offering a range of programs and services provided by professionals with school and district experience. EXCEerator uses its Diagnostic Approach to partner with district leaders to analyze and assess their current college readiness strategies and to implement programs to improve the college readiness infrastructure. EXCEerator services currently include the District Diagnostic, Program Analyses, Implementation Services, Professional Development and Multiyear Partnerships.



¹ Ingels, Steven J., Ben Dalton, Tommy E. Holder Jr., Eric Lauff, and Laura J. Burns. 2011. *The High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSL:09): A First Look at Fall 2009 Ninth-Graders*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

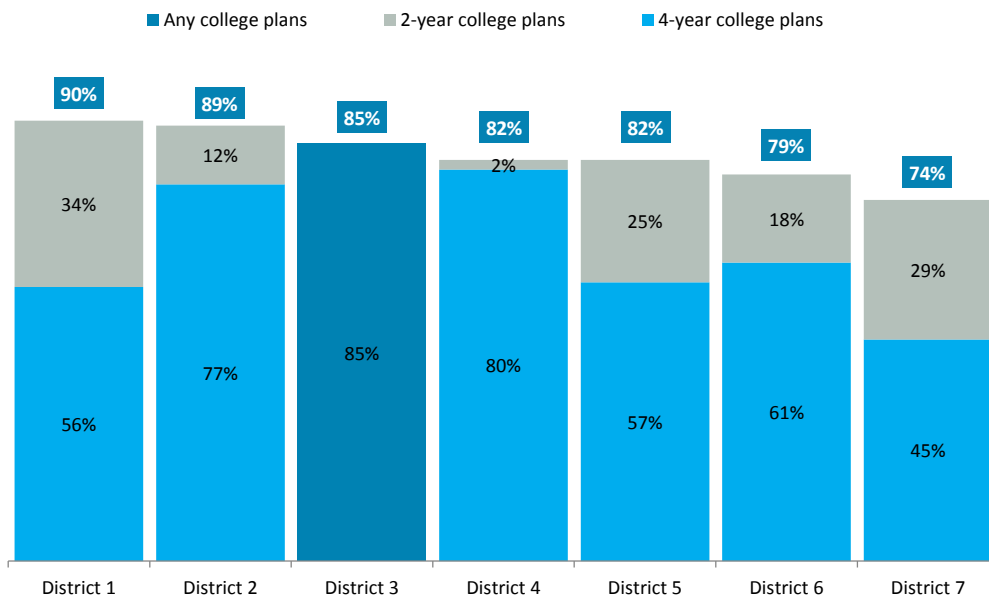
² National Center for Higher Education Management Systems

³ Adelman, Clifford. 2006. *The Toolbox Revisited: Paths to Degree Completion From High School Through College*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education; Adelman, Clifford. 1999. *Answers in the Tool Box: Academic Intensity, Attendance Patterns, and Bachelor's Degree Attainment*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

⁴ <http://professionals.collegeboard.com/data-reports-research/ap/summaries>

Postsecondary Plans of Students in Select EXCEerator Partner Districts

Seven out of nearly 20 EXCEerator partner districts collect data from students about postsecondary plans.



The College Board strongly encourages educators to make every effort to increase the likelihood that the diversity of their school's student population is reflected in its AP classes. AP presents a noteworthy opportunity to minimize existing gaps in college attainment. In fact, AP Exam performance is a stronger predictor of first-year college performance than gender, racial or ethnic identity, and socioeconomic status.⁵

The College Board's Equity and Access Policy Statement

The College Board strongly encourages educators to make equitable access a guiding principle for their AP programs by giving all willing and academically prepared students the opportunity to participate in AP. We encourage the elimination of barriers that restrict access to AP for students from ethnic, racial and socioeconomic groups that have been traditionally underserved. Schools should make every effort to ensure their AP classes reflect the diversity of their student population. The College Board also believes that all students should have access to academically challenging course work before they enroll in AP classes, which can prepare them for AP success. It is only through a commitment to equitable preparation and access that true equity and excellence can be achieved.

The first step toward eliminating opportunity gaps at the district level is adopting and implementing an equitable access policy for academically rigorous courses that prepare students for college — including AP. Districts can increase access to AP by removing gate-keeping mechanisms.

Ensuring that AP classes reflect the diversity of the overall student body often requires active recruitment of underrepresented AP students, including low-income and minority students. Districts and schools should actively work with students to place them in the appropriate courses. AP enrollment policies should focus on identifying all academically prepared students, and not on excluding students based on a single, rigid criterion. All motivated and academically prepared students who want to take AP courses should be allowed to do so. Student eligibility for AP can be determined by multiple factors, including:

- AP Potential™, a free College Board tool that identifies students likely to succeed in AP based on PSAT/NMSQT® scores;
- Teacher identification and recommendation of potential AP students;
- Student academic preparation; and
- Student interest and motivation.

⁵ Patterson, Brian F., Sheryl Packman, and Jennifer L. Kobrin. 2011. *Advanced Placement® Exam-Taking and Performance: Relationships with First-Year Subject Area College Grades*. New York: The College Board.

District

An **AP readiness system** establishes college readiness in an entire school district through a comprehensive AP program that incorporates a pipeline beginning in middle school and serves as a bridge to college.

School

AP programs have a transformative impact on an entire school's culture and establish a clear expectation of college-going regardless of family background.

Classroom

AP courses are powerful college readiness resources that provide high school students with stand-alone opportunities to experience college rigor.

Building an effective districtwide AP readiness system or schoolwide AP program requires a long-term strategy. EXCEerator believes that districts are most likely to succeed in broadening AP access when they foster a college-going culture and develop structures that support AP students and teachers.

A long-term strategy for AP expansion should include the development of a districtwide curriculum that exposes all students to academically challenging course work long before they enroll in AP courses. Districts that focus on students' pre-AP preparation — diversifying the pool of future AP students while they are still in elementary school and middle school — ensure that academically prepared high school students enroll in AP. Academic supports like academic boot camps, structured tutorials and peer mentoring increase the likelihood that students stay and succeed in AP courses. Curriculum should map AP and college expectations back to sixth grade and emphasize:

- Higher-order critical thinking skills;
- Deeper conceptual understanding; and
- Expanded academic vocabulary.

In addition, the district curriculum should be vertically aligned and take into account the sequential courses students need. For example, completion of an algebra course by eighth grade puts students on the path to take calculus during high school, resulting in better-prepared students for AP course work in math.

AP students are more likely to be successful when AP teachers have the instructional skills and content expertise to support diverse learners. Like AP students, AP teachers need feedback and reinforcement to master instructional skills fundamental to success in AP. By providing the time, space and resources for professional development and collaboration, districts can build the skills of existing AP teachers and create a pipeline of future AP teachers. Examples of district support include:

- Formal professional development opportunities to develop instructional skills and content expertise for both AP and pre-AP teachers prior to and while teaching AP courses;
- Informal coaching and feedback that reinforce new skills;
- Time to collaborate with peers teaching the same AP course; and
- Time to collaborate with peers across content areas and grades.

The College Board's EXCEerator Group has worked with nearly 20 districts to improve college readiness infrastructure. Through its work with educational leaders across the country, EXCEerator has identified seven elements of effective districtwide AP readiness systems and schoolwide AP programs. These elements include:

- **Leadership** — Leaders have a coherent vision for AP that includes leadership of curriculum planning, course sequencing, teacher and student support, and marketing AP to all stakeholders.
- **Curriculum Planning and Sequencing** — There are explicit connections within and across content areas in which school-based professionals work to create an environment in classrooms that results in a high level of performance for all students.
- **Culture of Expectations** — There are clearly articulated expectations regarding the benefits of AP and its curriculum framework that are communicated as early as middle school in order to foster a college ready culture in schools and with students and families.
- **Instructional Support** — Teachers have opportunities to increase their agility with AP course content, college-level instruction and the efficacy level of the program through professional development, collaboration with peers and resource allocation beyond the formal observation process.
- **Student Support** — Schools have built-in supports for students to learn key cognitive strategies and self-management skills and to receive multiple academic interventions before and during an AP course.
- **Data Analysis** — Data is collected and analyzed in order to provide feedback, assess progress and adjust strategies that drive teaching and learning.
- **Examination Readiness** — Schools understand examination expectations and administrative resources needed to support the administration of AP Examinations.

Putting all elements into place requires a long-term strategy. Broadening access to AP is the first step toward districtwide equity and access. After committing to broadening their AP system, districts should analyze their current system's strengths and weaknesses, identify and prioritize areas for improvement, and set goals and performance targets based on those areas.

The EXCEerator Group provides customized support to districts working on developing an infrastructure that supports college readiness for all students. Two references, the College Board's *Spotlight on Success: Strategies for Equity and Access* and the Broad Foundation's *Expanding Advanced Placement (AP) Access: A Guide to Increasing AP Participation and Success as a Means for Improving College Readiness*, provide guidance for districts expanding AP readiness systems.

To learn more about EXCEerator, visit exceleator.collegeboard.org.

