

*The pandemic is exacerbating educational inequities in our education system, so it is essential that state leaders respond in ways that prioritize our most vulnerable students.*

***This guide can help.***



# GRADUATION AND COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

**Curriculum and instructional materials that are aligned to high standards, appropriately challenging for students' grade level, and culturally responsive are critical to students' learning and academic trajectory.** When students face content and skills gaps – which happens all too often and will only be exacerbated by school closures – schools often respond by denying them access to grade-level content that is engaging and challenging, which leaves them even further behind their peers. Even when students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and students with disabilities demonstrate readiness, they are often denied access to more rigorous materials and courses, despite the fact that when advanced opportunities are extended to students of color, and when teachers receive the training and resources they need to provide essential supports, these students thrive alongside their peers. The health crisis poses a number of unique challenges, [especially for high school students](#), who will need support to meet graduation requirements, prepare for postsecondary opportunities, and navigate the transition after graduation.

Schools should hold all students to high standards, even during a pandemic. The beginning of the school year provides an opportunity for advocates to prompt state leaders to reexamine how they are supporting districts and schools in ensuring all students have access to a culturally relevant, rigorous, and engaging curriculum. This includes urging state leaders to provide and require districts to administer high-quality diagnostic assessments so that teachers and school leaders can provide all students with the appropriate instructional supports and resources and identify students for advanced coursework opportunities, especially in the absence of end-of-year assessment data from spring 2020.

**EQUITY PRINCIPLE:** Every student – especially students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, English learners, students with disabilities, and students experiencing homelessness – is held to high academic expectations. They have access to challenging, engaging, grade-level content; get the support they need to graduate high school; and are prepared to enter a two- or four-year college and/or pursue a career that pays a living wage.

## EQUITY ACTIONS:

- Provide **professional learning to educators or guidance/materials, especially for high-need districts, on how to adapt curriculum** to accelerate student learning to address unfinished instruction, prioritize standards that are most critical for preparing students for the next grade level, and provide additional support to students while maintaining access to grade-level content, such as tutoring or one-on-one instruction.
- Create a **centralized website that houses high-quality, standards-aligned instructional materials** for educators and families to use to support all students, including English learners and students with disabilities, during distance learning and extended learning time.
- Ensure that any state-endorsed **academic standards and curricular materials highlight racially diverse authors, historical figures, and experiences**, without being racially and ethnically stereotypical, and provide **guidance and/or materials** that districts can adapt to help educators learn to use these materials in culturally-sustaining ways.
- Maintain a focus on **increasing access to and success in advanced coursework** by:
  - Providing guidance to districts on **equitably identifying and enrolling students in advanced courses** using a combination of measures, even in moments like this one, where end-of-year assessment data is widely unavailable (e.g., data such as diagnostic assessment results, course exam scores, previous scores on state tests, PSAT/SAT scores, grades in relevant subject areas, and teacher and counselor recommendations).
  - **Monitoring data on the participation rates** of students of color, English learners, students with disabilities, and students from low-income backgrounds in lower-level and advanced courses, including looking for early indicators that inequities in access are widening in response to COVID-19, noting those patterns for district leaders, and requiring them to develop an actionable plan to reverse the trend.
  - Providing **funding to high-need districts** for advanced coursework exams, [dual enrollment](#), transportation, books and other curriculum materials.
- Facilitate **coordination between secondary and postsecondary institutions** to establish criteria for graduation and postsecondary readiness, especially if part or all of the school year involves virtual learning.

### Florida Expands AP Access and Success for Latino Students

Florida has taken a number of steps to expand access to advanced coursework for underrepresented students. Nearly two decades ago, the state began providing [free PSAT tests](#) to all high school sophomores, so educators could use the test scores to identify high-achieving Black and Latino students who were being overlooked for advanced coursework. Florida also provides materials and teacher training to expand access to AP programs in schools serving historically underserved student groups. As a result of these efforts, the state has significantly increased access to and success in AP coursework for Latino students. For example, in 2000, only 5,800 passed an AP exam with a score of 3 or higher; in 2015, the number of Latino students passing at least one AP exam was 42,000.

