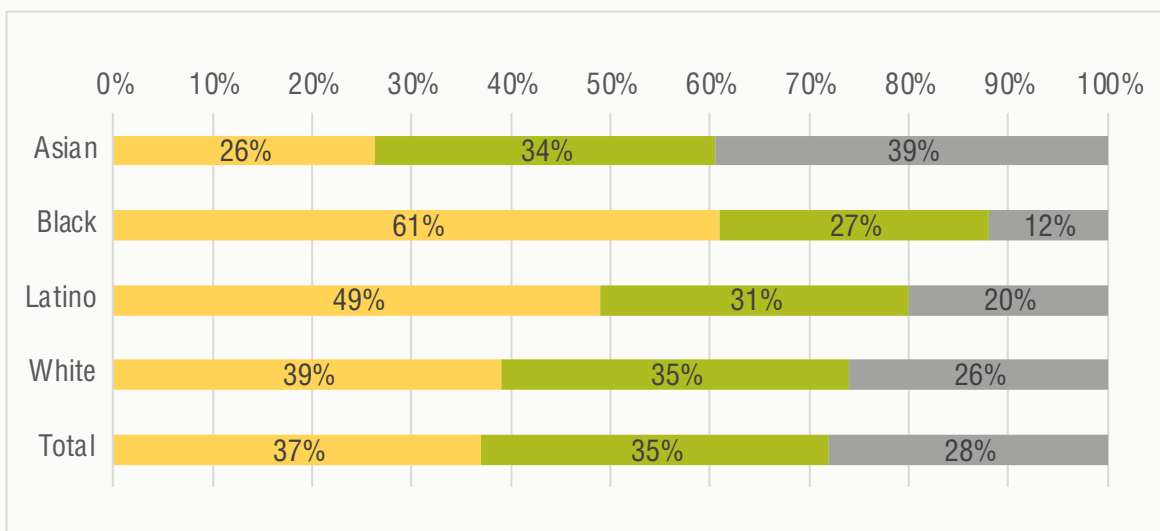


# Making the Case for AP Test Transparency in Massachusetts

Massachusetts is a [national leader](#) in AP performance and enrollment. However, Massachusetts has no statewide standard for awarding AP credits, so a score of 3 on an AP exam may be accepted for credit at one institution but not at another for the same exact course.

This inconsistency makes it harder for students to earn college credit, and disproportionately harms students of color. While scores of 3, 4, and 5 are passing scores, Black and Latino students and students from low-income backgrounds are [more likely](#) to submit an AP exam score of 3, and less likely to submit a score of 5 than their student counterparts.

## AP Test Score Breakdown Among Passing Scores (3, 4, or 5) by Race: SY 2021-22



● Score = 3   ● Score = 4   ● Score = 5

Source: Ed Trust analysis of data from the [Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education \(DESE\)](#) (accessed March 2023).

This means students of color are less likely to be awarded credit for their hard work and achievement on the AP exam, saving them time and money in their postsecondary journey.

Importantly, [studies](#) show that students who earn a 3 or higher perform well in college courses, take more college coursework in their AP disciplines, and are more likely to graduate in four years than students who score a 1 or 2. And the benefits of earning college credit are significant. [Research](#) finds that students who enter college with approximately 10 hours of AP credit have \$1,000 less debt, on average, which is important given the higher student loan debt burdens Black and Latino students carry.

Institutions must be transparent and consistent in how they award college credit. While 36 other states have statewide standards for awarding credit — [Texas](#) and [Illinois](#), for example, require higher education institutions to award credit for a score of 3 or above — Massachusetts has no statewide policy for higher education institutions on accepting AP scores, nor does it require institutions to publish their AP credit policies.

## Policy Recommendations

To increase equitable enrollment in AP classes, increase the benefits of taking these classes, and save students time and money by earning college credit, Massachusetts should:

### 1) **Require public higher education institutions to be transparent and consistent in how they award college credit.**

- **Proposed Solution:** [Bill S.838](#) and [Bill H.1280](#) would require all public higher education institutions to adopt, and make available on their websites, clear policies about how AP credits map to degree requirements, and prohibit institutions from requiring a minimum exam score higher than 3, unless specific reasoning is provided. Having a statewide policy would help to ensure that institutions are transparent and consistent in how they award college credit and help students earn an on-ramp to college.
- Students deserve to know that their hard work and passing scores will be rewarded. Colleges and universities should make credit transfer information clear and accessible, so students and their families can make more informed college choices.

### 2) **Require and support districts to expand eligibility for advanced coursework.**

- **Proposed Solution:** Districts can adopt policies whereby students are automatically enrolled in advanced courses — unless their families opt them out — if students are identified for advanced coursework via multiple measures. This may include open enrollment for any student who is interested in taking an advanced class.
- **Example:** State policies in [Illinois](#), [North Carolina](#), [Texas](#), and [Washington](#) require districts to automatically enroll students in an advanced course learning opportunity the next year, if they earn a certain score on an end-of-grade test.