Increasing Access to Advanced Coursework in Texas

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Policy Recommendations

To increase equitable enrollment in DC classes, enhance the benefits of taking these classes, and help students earn college credit that can save them time and money, Texas should:

- Collect and clearly report essential data and monitor access to and success in advanced classes
  - The Texas reporting system broadly defines advanced course completion and lumps together AP, IB, and DC courses. While the data in this category is disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and student group, to better identify inequities across course types, the state should also share completion and proficiency data that is separated by advanced course type and income status, so it can monitor the impact of HB 8, and FAST specifically, in the future. These data collection and reporting changes should incorporate new College Connect programs to better understand outcomes, especially for students who are exempt from meeting TSI thresholds prior to enrolling in these courses.
  - Additionally, the THECB should share disaggregated enrollment data from colleges that used multiple measures to determine eligibility for DC courses during the pandemic and look at which criteria colleges used to better understand how academic requirements such as TSI criteria may or may not act as barriers to entry for students who are underrepresented in DC courses. If more students of color and students from low-income backgrounds were enrolled in DC courses via multiple measures, and colleges’ DC passage rates were unchanged, the state can promote the use of more expansive DC frameworks that include more students.

- Support districts to expand eligibility for and access to advanced courses
  - SB 2124 should help increase access to advanced courses in middle school and put more students on pathways to advanced coursework in the future. To maximize the impact of this policy, districts should make its purpose and intentions clear to all school staff and provide teachers with needed training and support, particularly to ensure that they adopt a growth mindset toward their students. Districts should also emphasize foundational math instruction in elementary grades to ensure that SB 2124 leads to more equitable access. Some districts will also need to focus on staffing to ensure that they can offer advanced math.
• Schools and districts must clearly communicate with families about the benefits of advanced coursework and what this new policy change means. School districts should also collect and publicly report data, disaggregated by gender, race and income, to ensure all high-achieving students benefit from this policy.

• Texas should also extend its automatic advanced-course enrollment policy to high schools. EdTrust’s 2023 report “Opportunities Denied: High-Achieving Black and Latino Students Lack Access to Advanced Math” finds that even high-achieving and students from low-income backgrounds who access and succeed in eighth grade Algebra are less likely to take advanced math courses in high school, suggesting that state policy can do more to ensure that advanced math in high school is not a privilege, but a pathway open to all students. The state can look to North Carolina, which passed a policy that automatically places all students in grades three and up who score at the highest level on their end-of-grade math test into an advanced math class.

• Districts should also prioritize strong and proactive advising, so students are aware of their coursework options. Additionally, existing policies and procedures within school districts for identifying students who are eligible to take advanced coursework will need to change as higher-education institutions start to utilize College Connect or other avenues that are more inclusive of students who do not meet college-readiness thresholds through TSI, but can still benefit from DC courses and receive credit toward high school graduation.

• Foster positive school climates and a sense of belonging in advanced classes
  
  • Creating a sense of belonging is fundamental to student success in advanced courses. Yet the onus should not be on the students themselves — schools and systems must create environments that ensure that students of color can fully engage with their peers and classroom content. To do so, schools and districts can invest in recruiting and retaining teachers of color, providing guidance through near-peer mentors, utilizing culturally sustaining curricula, sharing information with students and families about advanced coursework opportunities in middle school, and offering targeted supports, such as Bootcamps in the summer or separate study sessions for Emergent Bilingual Learners, to help students build confidence.

• For more, see EdTrust’s resource on 5 Questions to Ask District and School Leaders About Access to Advanced STEM Coursework in High School

• Ensure that the state clearly signals the value of advanced coursework within its accountability indicators for College, Career, and Military Readiness (CCMR)

• At the local level, school system leaders should also adopt rigorous CCMR goals and progress measures, like those aligned to the state’s CCMR Outcome Bonus, which provides additional funding to districts that meet certain thresholds. EdTrust’s district-level policy scan provides criteria, rubrics, and guiding questions for district board members and administrators to use and follow.