

COURSE ACCESS: AN INTRODUCTION

A student's opportunity to learn too often depends on where he or she goes to school.

Providing access to all of the courses and academic content necessary to meet each student's needs, interests, and abilities is challenging, if not impossible, for most schools given the wide variety of students they serve. Students who attend rural, urban, or under-resourced schools often lack access to advanced science and math classes, college preparatory courses, foreign language classes, career/technical classes in high-demand job sectors, or other specialized subjects taught by expert teachers.

The numbers are alarming. Across the country, less than two-thirds of high schools offer physics. Only about half of high schools offer calculus. Among high schools that serve large percentages of African-American and Latino students, one in four don't offer Algebra II, and one in three don't offer chemistry. These courses are essential for any student who wants to pursue a career in engineering or other STEM fields. On average, African-American, Latino, and low-income students have less access to Advanced Placement courses and gifted and talented programs than other students.

One way to level the playing field is Course Access.

Course Access provides public school students with expanded course offerings across learning environments from diverse, accountable providers. Through this state-based program, students work with counselors and parents to enroll in the classes they need for their educations and careers. Regardless of where they live, students have access to a menu of free academic and career/technical courses that have been vetted for quality and are online, in-person, or some combination thereof. The course providers can include non-profit organizations, individual instructors, and education software providers. They offer students rigorous classes for course credit or industry certification, aligned to state standards. All course providers are held accountable for making sure students succeed.

Students still attend their local schools where they can continue to learn from their schools' teachers, have lunch with their friends, and join extracurricular activities such as the band or the football team. But they also have a world of new opportunities to follow their passions and personalize their learning.

Several states are beginning to explore the benefits of Course Access for their students. In the attached reports, we examine existing and ideal Course Access programs and policies, develop recommendations for how states can create their own programs, and, most importantly, highlight what Course Access has the potential to do: give every student, no matter where they live or what school they attend, the chance to fulfill his or her potential.

*For more information please contact any of the supporting organizations
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