

District Leadership Playbook

Expanding Access to Advanced Placement for Students of Color

1. Examine Your Data

2. Set the Priority & Build Buy-In

Put access to AP at the top of the agenda.

- Secure board support
- Issue a clear mandate
- Signal your seriousness
- Build awareness, cultivate commitment

3. Empower School Leaders

Provide data and know-how.

- Give principals data on AP Potential
- Convene school leaders to create action plans
- Rethink master scheduling

4. Enlist Students

Invite students of color into AP and make AP inviting to students of color.

- Open up access
- Extend a warm invitation
- Aim for “critical mass”
- Offer tangible rewards
- Equip students and teachers for success
- Build the K-8 pipeline

5. Establish Accountability & Evaluate Success

Monitor progress and make progress matter.

- Set district-wide goals and school-level targets
- Evaluate leaders based on results
- Share data and be transparent
- Celebrate wins

I. The Opportunity

Every year, thousands of Black, Hispanic, and Native American students miss out on an opportunity to realize their potential because they do not enroll in Advanced Placement (AP) courses in which they are likely to succeed. Among students of color in the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) class of 2014, those numbers ranged from more than 8,000 in mathematics to over 25,000 in history/social studies. (See Figure 1.)

Students who do not realize their AP potential miss out on many important advantages. For example:

- AP examinees are more likely to enroll in a four-year institution compared with similar students who do not take any AP Exams.¹
- AP examinees are more likely to persist and graduate on-time from college than students of similar academic ability who did not take an AP Exam.²
- AP examinees earning a 3 or higher consistently earn higher GPAs in college than their matched peers.³
- Scoring 3 or higher on an AP Exam can earn students valuable college credit and placement that could help reduce college costs.

AP Potential

What is AP Potential? AP Potential is a free, Web-based tool that allows states, districts, and schools to generate rosters of students who are likely to score a 3 or higher on a given AP Exam. Based on research that shows strong correlations between PSAT/NMSQT scores and AP Exam results, AP Potential is designed to help educators increase access to AP and to ensure that no student who has the chance of succeeding in AP is overlooked.

Who can access AP Potential? District officials, high school principals, counselors, teachers, and state department of education officials can access AP Potential.

How Can I Access AP Potential? On the AP Potential website, first-time visitors are asked to create an educational professional account and enter their AP Potential access code. Access codes are emailed in early December.

How should I use AP Potential? College Board research has shown that PSAT/NMSQT scores are useful in identifying students who have a high likelihood of succeeding on AP Exams. Studies show that PSAT/NMSQT scores are stronger predictors of students' AP Exam scores than the more traditional factors such as high school grades, including grades in same-discipline course work.

AP Potential should never be used to discourage a motivated student from registering for an AP course, since the AP Potential results only account for some of the factors that contribute to the students' exam results, and do not take into account the power of student motivation, parental support, and teacher efficacy.

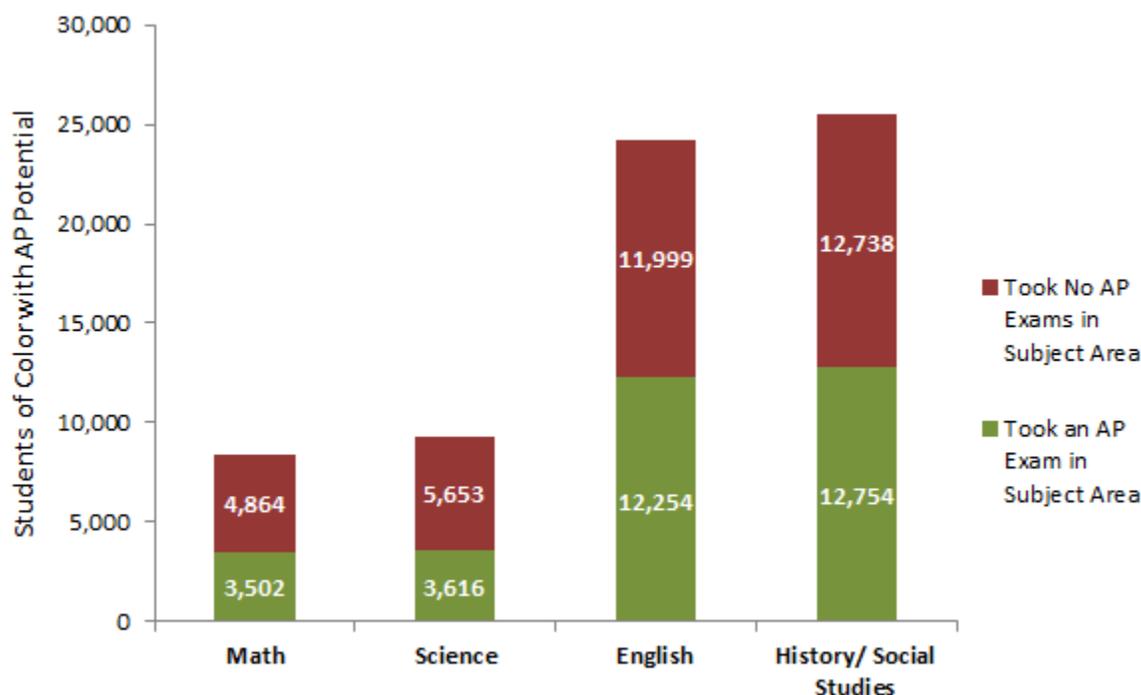
Please visit <https://appotential.collegeboard.org> to learn more.

¹ Chajewski, M., Mattern, K.D., & Shaw, E.J. (2011). Examining the role of Advanced Placement® exam participation in four-year college enrollment. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, 30, 16-27.

² Mattern, K.D., Shaw, E.J., & Xiong, X. (2009). The relationship between AP® exam performance and college outcomes (College Board Research Report 2009-4). New York: The College Board. Mattern, K.D., Marini, J.M., & Shaw, E.J. (2013). Are AP students more likely to graduate from college on time? (College Board Research Report 2013-5). New York: The College Board.

³ Mattern, K.D., Shaw, E.J., & Xiong, X. (2009). The relationship between AP® exam performance and college outcomes (College Board Research Report 2009-4). New York: The College Board. Patterson, B.F., Packman, S., & Kobrin, J.L. (2011). Advanced Placement® exam-taking and performance: Relationships with first-year subject area college grades (College Board Research Report 2011-4). New York: The College Board.

Figure 1. Students of Color with AP Potential in CGCS Graduating Class of 2014



These students also might be missing out on another crucial advantage – a head start on a rewarding career. AP examinees are more likely to major in the subject area of their AP Exam or in a related discipline, and that relationship is especially strong for STEM-related fields.⁴ Black and Hispanic students who take AP STEM course work are 3-6 times more likely than their peers to major in related STEM disciplines.⁵

Figure 2 shows the number of students of color in the CGCS 2014 graduating class who had potential to succeed in AP STEM courses yet did not take an AP Exam matched with their proven academic strengths. The numbers are especially high in AP Environmental Science.

Untapped talent carries high costs – for students, for their communities, and for the country. Jobs in environmental science pay an average of \$63,000 per year, require only a bachelor’s degree at entry, and are projected to grow at a faster-than-average rate over the next two decades. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that the American economy will add 13,200 new jobs in environmental science by 2022.⁶

⁴ Mattern, K. D., Shaw, E. J., Ewing, M. (2011). Is AP exam participation and performance related to choice of college major? (College Board Research Report 2011-6). New York: The College Board. Mattern, K. D., Shaw, E. J., Ewing, M. (2011). Is AP exam participation and performance related to choice of college major? (College Board Research Report 2011-6). New York: The College Board. Tai, R. H., Liu, C. Q., Almarode, J. T., & Fan, X. (2010). Advanced placement course enrollment and long-range educational outcomes. In P. M Sadler, G. Sonnert, R. H. Tai, & K. Klopfenstein (Eds.), *AP: A Critical Examination of the Advanced Placement Program* (pp. 109–118).

⁵ Morgan, R. & Klaric, J. (2007). AP® Students in college: An analysis of five-year academic careers (College Board Research Report 2007-4). New York: The College Board.

⁶ <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/life-physical-and-social-science/environmental-scientists-and-specialists.htm#tab-1>

Figure 2. CGCS Class of 2014 Graduates Who Had Potential to Succeed in AP STEM Courses But Did Not Take a Matched AP Exam

	Black Students	Hispanic Students	Native American Students	Total Students of Color
Environmental Science	2,422	5,134	121	7,677
Statistics	1,888	4,091	106	6,085
Computer Science A	1,796	4,037	99	5,932
Biology	1,462	3,309	92	4,863
Chemistry	1,403	3,120	89	4,612
Physics B	1,336	2,999	81	4,416
Physics C: Mechanics	1,254	2,853	77	4,184
Physics C: Electricity and Magnetism	676	1,729	47	2,452
Calculus	605	1,289	37	1,931

Local education leaders are in the strongest position to make a difference in the academic opportunities offered to students of color, and many already are acting. As Michael Casserly and David Coleman wrote to CGCS superintendents in November, “The ground that’s been gained for these students has largely been the result of the inspired and dogged work of superintendents, school board members, staff, and teachers in our major cities.”

Indeed, every day, districts across the country are finding new ways to provide new AP opportunities to students of color. Consider New Haven Public Schools, which increased AP participation among students of color from 16 percent to 24 percent between 2010 and 2014.

Torey Robinson, an African American student who graduated from New Haven’s Co-op High School last spring, felt uncertain when a teacher encouraged him to take AP courses. Until he transferred to Co-op from a high school in a different school district, Torey had never even heard of AP. But today he’s glad he rose to the challenge. Here’s what the *New Haven Independent* wrote about Torey’s experience:

Taking an AP course was like culture shock, Torey said. It was a lot of work: “Wow.” His notebook became “full of notes” when only half the year had gone by. He ended up earning a passing score of 3 in microeconomics, and earning college credit. He said he was glad his teacher encouraged him to sign up, and motivated him to stick with it. Until you take that challenge, he said, “you really don’t know what you can do.”⁷

Now, the Council of the Great City Schools, the College Board, and the White House — through its My Brother’s Keeper initiative — are partnering to dramatically increase the proportion of

⁷ *New Haven Independent*, “Co-Op High Helps State Soar On AP Tests,” February 12, 2014. http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/co-op_high_helps_state_win_triple_crown_on_ap_tests/

students of color with AP potential who enroll in AP classes. The National Council of La Raza, the National Urban League, and The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights also recently pledged their support.

The effort is built on a simple but powerful idea: Every African American, Hispanic, and Native American student who is ready for AP should take AP. As seen in Figure 3, there are opportunities to make a difference and improve access in every discipline.

Figure 3. CGCS Class of 2014 Graduates Who Had Potential to Succeed in AP, by Gender

	English			Mathematics			Science			History & Social Science		
	With AP Potential	Took the AP Exam	Did Not Take the AP Exam	With AP Potential	Took the AP Exam	Did Not Take the AP Exam	With AP Potential	Took the AP Exam	Did Not Take the AP Exam	With AP Potential	Took the AP Exam	Did Not Take the AP Exam
Black Students												
Total	8,060	3,740	4,320	2,531	932	1,599	2,820	994	1,826	8,275	3,681	4,594
Females	5,016	2,522	2,494	1,301	459	842	1,505	529	976	4,884	2,258	2,626
Males	3,035	1,218	1,817	1,229	473	756	1,314	465	849	3,387	1,423	1,964
Hispanic Students												
Total	15,852	8,350	7,502	5,699	2,529	3,170	6,303	2,579	3,724	16,861	8,916	7,945
Females	8,796	4,988	3,808	2,486	985	1,501	2,899	1,150	1,749	8,677	4,816	3,861
Males	7,037	3,360	3,677	3,207	1,544	1,663	3,397	1,429	1,968	8,164	4,099	4,065
Native American Students												
Total	341	164	177	136	41	95	146	43	103	356	157	199
Females	201	96	105	74	15	59	83	24	59	204	91	113
Males	139	68	71	62	26	36	63	19	44	151	66	85

The following section offers a framework superintendents can consider as they create plans to deliver greater AP opportunities to their students of color. The final section offers additional resources for taking action.

II. A Framework for Action

This section offers a framework superintendents can consider when crafting plans to enroll more students of color with AP potential in AP courses matching their academic strengths and interests. It includes examples gathered from interviews with leaders in five districts making significant progress in this effort:

- Hillsborough County Public Schools, FL
- Houston Independent School District, TX
- Long Beach Unified School District, CA
- Montgomery County Schools, MD
- New Haven Public Schools, CT

1. Examine Your Data

Superintendents can begin by conducting a clear-eyed examination of scope of the challenge. Long Beach began its efforts to expand AP opportunities in 2004 when data revealed that students of color were vastly underrepresented in AP courses.

College Board regional vice presidents are contacting CGCS superintendents to arrange a meeting during which they can review PSAT/NMSQT and AP potential data for the entire district and for each of its high schools.

2. Set the Priority & Build Buy-In

Large urban districts often have multiple initiatives taking place during any given year. In every district that has made significant progress enrolling more students of color in AP, the superintendent issued a clear directive and worked to build the buy-in necessary to put AP at the top of the agenda.

Five Areas for Action

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2. Set the Priority & Build Buy-in

Put access to AP at the top of the agenda.

- Secure board support
- Issue a clear mandate
- Signal your seriousness
- Build awareness, cultivate commitment

3. Empower School Leaders

Provide data and know-how.

- Give principals data on AP Potential
- Convene school leaders to create annual action plans
- Rethink master scheduling

4. Enlist Students

Invite students of color into AP and make AP inviting to students of color.

- Open up access
- Extend a warm invitation
- Aim for “critical mass”
- Offer tangible rewards
- Equip students and teachers for success
- Build the K-8 pipeline

5. Establish Accountability & Evaluate Success

Monitor progress and make progress matter.

- Set district-wide goals and school-level targets
- Evaluate leaders based on results
- Share data and be transparent
- Celebrate wins

➤ **Secure board support**

Superintendents should consider what kind of support they will need from the board. In Houston, the board passed a budget enabling all students who took an AP class to seek college credit by taking the AP Exam at the end of the course. In other districts, boards passed resolutions demonstrating strong support for the initiative. Long Beach leaders gained early support by making a presentation to board members outlining the goals and strategies of the proposed initiative before formally launching it.

➤ **Issue a clear mandate**

Superintendents can launch the initiative by issuing a clear, vocal mandate that high schools must dramatically increase the proportion of students of color with AP potential who are enrolled in AP courses. District leaders interviewed for this effort all emphasized the importance of putting two concepts at the center of their messaging – the imperative of equity and the importance of preparing all students for college and careers.

➤ **Signal your seriousness**

Superintendents can best signal seriousness by establishing and communicating district-wide goals for expanding access to AP courses among students of color. To develop ambitious yet attainable benchmarks, superintendents can identify high-progress high schools in their own districts as well as look to similar districts that have made significant progress over time. District leaders can emphasize their commitment by communicating how they will hold themselves and other key players accountable for making measurable progress.

Leaders interviewed for this effort all made sure to demonstrate that the superintendent was leading the charge. For example, Long Beach superintendent Chris Steinhauser asked principals to send their building action plans for expanding AP directly to him instead of to their regional superintendents.

➤ **Build awareness, cultivate commitment**

Superintendents can build awareness about the need for action by sharing data on AP equity and opportunity gaps with principals and other key leaders. And they can create urgency by emphasizing the role that AP can play in preparing students for college and careers. In Montgomery County, leaders emphasized that gains in AP access and success would drive improvements in other measures of college readiness as well.

3. Empower School Leaders

Principals need data and support to create meaningful action plans for expanding access to AP courses in their high schools.

➤ Give principals data on AP Potential

The College Board offers a free, Web-based AP Potential tool that allows district and school personnel to generate rosters of students who are likely to score a 3 or higher on a given AP Exam based on their PSAT/NMSQT scores. (See sidebar on page 2.) Although principals can access the tool themselves, leaders interviewed for this effort strongly recommend that central offices also provide principals with aggregate data on how well their schools have done in providing AP opportunities in previous years.

Many principals are surprised to find that the number of students with potential to succeed in AP courses exceeds the number of students who take AP courses. Precise data on untapped talent can help principals create ambitious yet attainable goals for expanding access to AP in their schools.

➤ Convene school leaders to create action plans

Superintendents can accelerate progress by personally convening principals to create campus action plans and by attending as many follow-up sessions as possible. Some superintendents invite other members of the building's AP leadership team to participate, such as AP Coordinators and school counselors.

These convenings should allow school leaders to:

- Learn about district-wide components of the initiative;
- Analyze data on their own high schools;
- Share strategies and obtain peer-to-peer advice and feedback;
- Discover successful practices at local high schools that already enroll students of color in AP courses at higher or increasing rates; and
- Begin to develop a campus action plan to increase AP enrollment and success.

Long Beach superintendent Steinhauser convened all high school AP leadership teams on a monthly basis to create action plans, analyze data and progress, and share lessons learned. He

made it a priority on his calendar to attend the monthly meetings until the mission and goals of the initiative became embedded within the district's culture.

➤ **Rethink master scheduling**

When he was superintendent of North Carolina's Charlotte-Mecklenburg school district in the 1990s, Eric Smith famously "tore up" the master scheduling after seeing data showing that many students of color with high PSAT/NMSQT scores were not enrolled in AP courses. Not surprisingly, district leaders interviewed for this effort emphasized the importance of waiting to finalize master schedules until *after* principals have implemented their action plans and every effort had been made to enroll students in AP courses matching their demonstrated potential and interests.

4. Enlist Students

In focus groups conducted by the College Board, students of color repeatedly say that the single most important factor in their decision to take an AP class is support and encouragement from adults in their school. Superintendents can lead efforts to implement thoughtful strategies to invite students of color into AP while at the same time ensuring that AP courses seem inviting to students of color.

➤ **Open up access**

Leaders in districts making significant progress on this challenge emphasize the need to open up access to AP by considering factors beyond prior grades and recommendations from teachers and counselors. PSAT/NMSQT scores often uncover academic ability that might otherwise be overlooked, and they spotlight those students ready to be successful in AP. Houston Independent Schools replaced GPA and teacher recommendations with other factors such as PSAT/NMSQT data, completion of prerequisite coursework, and student ambition.

➤ **Extend a warm invitation**

The best encouragement to enroll in AP classes comes from adults who communicate a strong belief that the student can benefit from and succeed in challenging coursework. Many districts also send letters to parents to let them know that their students have potential to succeed in AP courses. The College Board's AP Potential website enables district and school leaders to generate customized letters to inform parents and guardians about a student's AP Potential in specific courses.

Some districts go even further. Like a loving aunt who "won't take no for an answer" to a holiday dinner invitation, Hillsborough County superintendent MaryEllen Elia made it hard for students and parents to say no to AP. When a parent or guardian expressed reluctance to have their student enroll in an AP class, the district held conferences and discussions with the parent. If that failed - and when the district felt strongly that the student should be in an AP class - the

district asked the parents to sign an “opt-out” form stating that they did not want their student enrolled. Elia even told principals to instruct parents to telephone her personally if they had concerns that school staff couldn’t assuage. Houston superintendent Terry Grier adopted a similar “opt out” policy for students who demonstrated AP potential based on their PSAT/NMSQT results.

➤ **Aim for a “critical mass”**

If a high school’s AP courses have traditionally enrolled very few students of color, such classrooms might not feel like inviting places to students of color with AP potential. Superintendents like Houston’s Grier have boosted AP enrollment by recruiting groups of students to enroll together, ensuring a “critical mass” of students of color in targeted AP courses.

This summer, Grier designated Westbury High School as Houston’s first “AP high school” where all students are expected to enroll in AP courses. Westbury’s ideal: Ninth-graders take two pre-AP courses, sophomores take pre-AP classes and one AP course, and juniors and seniors take two AP courses.

➤ **Offer tangible rewards**

In addition to ensuring clear messages to students about the real academic and life benefits of AP, superintendents should consider tangible ways to reward students for taking and succeeding in AP courses. In Long Beach, students wear special colors during graduation ceremonies based on their participation and success in AP courses, among other academic achievements.

Grier instituted an annual Cool to Be Smart event for Houston students who have taken academically advanced coursework, including AP classes and AP Exams. Students who receive an invitation to the event can win prizes sponsored by the HISD Foundation and the National Math and Science Institute. Each year, one fortunate senior goes home with a new car.

➤ **Equip students and teachers for success**

Some leaders might ask: “If the goal is to enroll students of color with proven AP potential, why would those students or their teachers need any additional support beyond what my district already offers?” Montgomery County leaders offer one compelling answer. AP teachers in that diverse county were used to teaching students who already had experienced highly challenging course work in 9th and 10th grade; many of the new recruits had not had such experiences. Therefore, teachers and students alike needed new kinds of skills and strategies to succeed.

Many districts have instituted “summer bridge” programs for students who will be experiencing AP for the first time the following school year. Such programs provide students with academic strategies and study techniques critical to succeed in college-level course work. Long Beach has

been offering an AP Summer Bridge Program since 2005. Some districts also offer AP tutorial programs during the year to help students prepare for AP Exams. New Haven now administers a “mock AP English exam” so students know what to expect when they sit for the real thing.

Superintendent Elia required AP teachers in Hillsborough County to attend an AP Summer Institute, a weeklong professional development session offered by a local college or university and endorsed by the College Board. She insisted that all AP teachers participate – no matter how long they had been teaching AP – and provided a stipend to every participant. The College Board offers scholarship opportunities for qualifying teachers to participate in AP Summer Institutes. Visit <http://professionals.collegeboard.com/k-12/awards/ap-teacher-scholarships> to learn more.

➤ **Build the K-8 pipeline**

Leaders in high-progress districts also emphasize the importance of attending to the “AP pipeline” – both to increase the number of students who demonstrate AP potential by 10th grade and to keep academically advanced students on track during middle school.

Superintendent Elia knew that in order to prepare more students from underrepresented groups for AP, Hillsborough County would need to completely rethink the middle school curriculum. In 2008 the district implemented College Board’s Springboard, a pre-AP English and math curriculum, to give middle and high school students the instructional foundation they would need to succeed in challenging AP course work.

5. Establish Accountability & Evaluate Success

Monitor progress and make progress matter.

➤ **Set district-wide goals and school-level targets**

As discussed above, superintendents should consider announcing district-wide goals when the initiative is publicly launched. School-level targets can be set later during meetings of school leaders convened by the superintendent, but also should be publicly announced when they are established. In Montgomery County, high school academic departments also set goals aligned with the effort.

➤ **Evaluate leaders based on results**

In Hillsborough County, superintendent Elia worked to include indicators related to AP in principal evaluations. She also agreed to incorporate AP-related metrics in her own performance contract. Finally, she leveraged her position on a statewide committee to advocate for AP to be represented in the state’s policy framework for high school accountability.

➤ **Share data and be transparent**

Long Beach aligned board, superintendent, and principal goals for AP expansion and then required all stakeholders to publicly report progress three times per year. The district has now gone a step further by making campus action plans public.

➤ **Celebrate wins**

In Montgomery County, principals whose high schools show progress in improving AP participation and success are invited to share their strategies with other building leaders. Houston celebrates “beat the odds” teachers who have great success moving students to higher levels of achievement than their prior test scores might have predicted. Some superintendents also work to obtain coverage of success stories in the local media.

III. Additional Resources

“Achieving Equity”

This College Board Web page offers tips on how to increase equity in AP participation and success; success stories and examples from schools and districts making progress in achieving greater equity; and information about how students can qualify for AP Exam fee waivers.

<http://professionals.collegeboard.com/k-12/assessment/ap/equity>

“AP Potential”

AP Potential is a free, Web-based tool from the College Board that allows schools to generate rosters of students who are likely to score a 3 or higher on a given AP Exam. The website also offers detailed information and supporting research related to AP Potential as well as a tool for generating customized letters to parents of students whose scores on the PSAT/NMSQT demonstrate potential to succeed in specific AP courses and Exams.

<https://appotential.collegeboard.org/app/welcome.do>

“Share AP”

This College Board Web page offers resources that educators can use to communicate with students and parents about the benefits of AP and what is expected of students in AP courses.

<https://lp.collegeboard.org/share-ap>

Finding America’s Missing AP and IB Students

Published by The Education Trust in 2013, this report offers recommendations for closing the AP opportunity gap and provides lessons and examples from districts and schools making progress in enrolling more low-income students and students of color in AP courses.

http://www.edtrust.org/missing_students

Expanding Advanced Placement (AP) Access: A Guide to Increasing AP Participation and Success as a Means for Improving College Readiness

Published by The Ely and Edythe Broad Foundation in 2009, this 130-page guide offers superintendents detailed advice for improving college readiness among high school students, particularly low-income students and students of color, by increasing access to AP course work and Exams.

<http://www.broadeducation.org/asset/1344-expandingapaccess.pdf>