
Accelerating Learning: Ensuring Access to Advanced Courses

More than 1.75 million high school students are not able to enroll in Advanced Placement® courses solely because the high schools they attend do not offer **any** AP® courses. Without consistent access to Advanced Placement throughout the states, students living in “AP Deserts,” especially rural and underrepresented students, will miss out on key courses that prepare students for postsecondary opportunities and entering the workforce.

Overview

For more than 60 years, the Advanced Placement (AP) Program has allowed students to challenge themselves in accelerated coursework that provides the essential skills needed for success in college and careers. However, many students do not have the option to participate in these courses based solely on the school they attend.

More than a million high school students attend schools in “AP Deserts” where no AP courses are available to them. These deserts deny students the ability to challenge themselves and get ahead on the road to college completion and career success.

[Georgetown's Center on Education and the Workforce](#) estimates that 65% of all jobs in today's economy require postsecondary education and training beyond high school, and AP helps prepare students for the jobs of tomorrow. Research shows that AP students are more likely to enroll in college, stay in college, do well in their classes, and graduate on time in four years.

AP Deserts

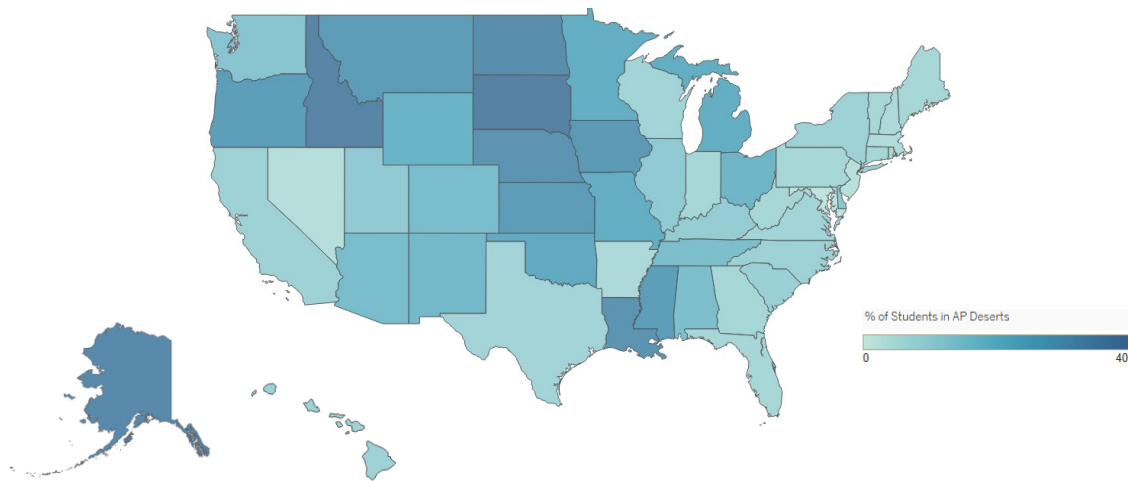
Education Trust's [Inequities in Advanced Coursework](#) report found that too many students of all races and ethnicities attend schools that do not offer an AP course.

College Board estimates that more than one-third of public high schools do not offer a single AP course, half of which are located in rural communities.

All told, that translates into 1.75 million students who are attending public high schools that do not offer an AP course. Of these students residing in AP Deserts, more than 730,000 are underrepresented minorities.

If these students *did* have access to AP courses, the data show they would be successful. Nearly a quarter of students identified as having “AP potential” based on scores from the PSAT™-related assessments or SAT® tests attended schools that did not offer the course in which they were identified as having the potential to succeed. This means thousands of students were unable to take advanced coursework despite demonstrating their ability to succeed.

Percent of Students Enrolled in AP Deserts



Eliminating AP Deserts: Model Policies

There are several ways states and districts can expand access to advanced coursework for all students.

Course Offering Requirement: In 2003, **Arkansas** passed a law requiring districts to offer one AP course in each of the four core subjects, and all high schools to offer at least four AP courses in any subject. The requirement was phased in through 2009 and led to a dramatic increase in AP participation. Nine states and the District of Columbia require AP courses to be available to all students.¹

Specific Course Expansion: In 2021, **Texas** appropriated funds to assist districts in making AP Computer Science Principles available at every high school. By targeting one specific course, Texas will help ensure that all students have access to a key course that prepares students for careers and future STEM courses.

Virtual Options: In 2020, **Massachusetts** received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to increase/create virtual AP STEM courses, targeting students currently attending schools in AP Deserts. The state identified 7,000 students with the potential to succeed in AP STEM among 40 AP Desert high schools.

Federal Funding to Eliminate AP Deserts

The U.S. Department of Education issued guidance explaining how to use federal relief funds to ensure all students have access to advanced coursework. Specifically, schools and districts are urged to:

- **Identify disparities.** Districts can use disaggregated student data to identify “disparities in access to and success in advanced courses” and to “assess current processes” for determining access to advanced coursework.
- **Eliminate barriers.** Districts should use this data to “implement active outreach” to historically underrepresented students and provide universal screening to identify additional prepared students.
- **Target underrepresented areas.** Federal guidance recommends using data to target resources to increase advanced course offerings (including necessary professional development for teachers).

¹ Arkansas, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, West Virginia, all require AP courses to be available ([Education Trust](#), 2019). A 2020 Oklahoma law requires universal access to AP courses by 2024-25.

