



Increasing Access to Advanced Coursework

Compelling evidence establishes that all students accelerate and deepen their learning through advanced courses (e.g., Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate Programme), early college high school courses, and dual enrollment¹ – yet there remain significant disparities in access to advanced coursework.² ESSA requires districts to report student subgroup participation in advanced coursework and provides several funding streams that districts can use to expand access to advanced coursework and increase students’ achievement in these courses, particularly in Title I schools.



What’s the Opportunity?

In an effort to advance equity, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides federal funds to assist states and districts in meeting the needs of traditionally underserved students, including students of color, students from low-income families, English learners, students with disabilities, and students who are homeless or in foster care. In exchange for robust data reporting, increased transparency, and a commitment to improve underperforming schools, ESSA provides states and districts with the financial flexibility to use federal ESSA funds on a wide range of actions.

Traditionally, district leaders have limited federal funds to expenditures that clearly met federal compliance requirements, such as funding additional academic interventions, due to concerns about triggering federal audits or oversight. While the law’s requirement to ensure that federal funds supplement, and do not supplant, state and local funds remains, district and school leaders are no longer bound by accounting restrictions that required to them to make cumbersome financial demonstrations.¹ As a result, district and school leaders now possess greater latitude to invest ESSA funds in ways they think are most likely to benefit underserved students, including aligning their use of ESSA funds with the district’s existing strategic priorities.

¹ Cecilia Speroni, “Determinants of Students’ Success: The Role of Advanced Placement and Dual Enrollment Programs,” National Center for Postsecondary Research, November 2011, http://www.postsecondaryresearch.org/i/a/document/19811_speroni_ap_de_paper_110311_final.pdf; Andrea Berger, et al., *Early College, Early Success: Early College High School Initiative Impact Study*, American Institutes for Research, September 2013, https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/ECHSI_Impact_Study_Report_Final1_0.pdf.

² Christine Theokas and Reid Saaris, *Finding America’s Missing AP and IB Students*, The Education Trust, June 2013, https://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Missing_Students.pdf.

This guide is intended to help district leaders disrupt the compliance mindset and inertia that have characterized traditional implementation of federal grants and leverage federal funding and programs in service of a more equitable education system.



Overcoming Potential Barriers to Equity

- Building a strong cadre of teachers trained specifically in the delivery of advanced coursework.
- Developing relationships with local institutions (of higher education) to provide students with access to dual enrollment coursework.
- Creating and implementing a pupil progression framework that readies students for advanced coursework starting in elementary and middle grades.
- Understanding which advanced courses are already available in the school district, where those are offered, and who is participating in those courses.
- Auditing requirements for participation in advanced coursework that may result in the under-identification of students, particularly students from subgroups.



Example: Chicago Expands Access to the International Baccalaureate (IB) Programme

District leaders often express concern about their capacity to expand access to advanced coursework, usually due to a shortage of teachers trained in advanced coursework programs, the costs associated with training teachers, subscriptions for advanced courses, and testing fees for students. But school districts like Chicago Public Schools (CPS) demonstrate how it is possible to increase access to advanced coursework in sustainable ways and how all students benefit from this access.

In 1997, then-Superintendent Paul Vallas developed an initiative to stem the “brain drain” from CPS. He suggested expanding the number of high schools approved by IB and expanding the number of AP courses offered in the district.³ Expanding the program to 14 neighborhood high schools cost the school

³ Maureen Kelleher, “How Chicago Became a Leader in IB,” *The Chicago Reporter*, June 19, 2015, <http://www.chicagoreporter.com/how-chicago-became-a-leader-in-ib/>.

district an additional \$5 million. “They’re not budget busters,” said Superintendent Vallas.⁴

Since the initial expansion of IB programming, CPS has continued to add schools to its IB network, growing to 22 high schools by 2015.⁵ Seven of these high schools are what is known as ‘wall-to-wall’ IB high schools because all students—rather than a small subset of students within the school—have access to some part of the IB Programme, thus reducing entrance barriers and within-school disparities in access to rigorous coursework. CPS also launched an IB Certificate, which is designed to provide students who are interested in career and technical education with the opportunity to take IB courses. Mayor Emanuel has also announced the CPS will begin extending the IB Programme into elementary and middle schools.⁶

Results from the IB initiative in CPS are promising. Students participating in the IB Programme are 40% more likely to attend a 4-year college and 50% more likely to attend a more selective college. Further, IB graduates are more likely to persist once in college.⁷

District leaders can use funding provisions in ESSA to launch initiatives like CPS’ IB Programme expansion. Title I funds, including school improvement resources, can be used to purchase course subscriptions and materials for qualifying schools, and Title II funds can be used to train teachers to deliver advanced courses. Additionally, district leaders can use Title III funds for training teachers of English Learners (EL) who deliver advanced coursework and to cover exam fees for ELs and Title IV funds to cover exam fees that can serve as a barrier for low-income students.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Chicago Public Schools, “Mayor Emanuel and CPS Announce Expansion of IB Programme at Agassiz Elementary School,” June 14, 2017, http://cps.edu/News/Press_releases/Pages/PR1_06_14_2017.aspx.

⁷ Vanessa Coca, et al., *Working to My Potential: The Postsecondary Experiences of CPS Students in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme*, University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research, March 2012, <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/publications/IB%20Report1.pdf>.



What Should I Look for in My State Context?

All states were required to submit state ESSA plans to the US Department of Education (USDOE), so district leaders interested in improving access to advanced coursework should familiarize themselves with the relevant aspects of their state plan⁸ related to this equity priority. Questions that district leaders can ask about their state plans and of their broader state context include:

- In addition to the required advanced coursework participation reporting requirements, how else – if at all – will my district be held accountable for advanced coursework? For example, are participation rates or passage rates a part of my state’s accountability formula and/or the state’s college and career readiness index?
- Does my state already pay for fees for exams or dual enrollment courses? If so, my district may be able to focus funds on other aspects of increasing access to advanced coursework.
- Does my state have any existing teacher training initiatives focused on advanced coursework? If so, how can my district capitalize on those existing initiatives?
- How is my state distributing school improvement grants and Title IV funds? Are they using a competitive grant process, distributing by formula, or taking a hybrid approach?
- Is my state going to reserve funds for Direct Student Services? If so, my district may be able to use some of this funding to cover dual enrollment costs or exam fees.
- How is my state defining evidence-based interventions? Have they developed a list from which district leaders must choose, or do we have the flexibility to choose any intervention that meets evidence requirements?



Turning ESSA’s Requirements into Opportunities

This table summarizes ESSA requirements for districts and provides illustrative examples of how district leaders could move beyond meeting ESSA’s requirements to using the law to drive their strategic priorities. Each box includes a reference to the related ESSA statutory provision found in the ESSA Provisions section of this brief (see p. 7) so that district leaders are able to validate any actions that they take to improve access to advanced coursework.

⁸ All state plans submitted to the US Department of Education are available here: <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/statesubmission.html>

	WHAT DOES ESSA REQUIRE DISTRICTS TO DO?	HOW COULD DISTRICT LEADERS BUILD ON ESSA REQUIREMENTS?
<p>REPORTING AND DATA ANALYSIS</p> 	<p>ESSA requires states and school districts to produce report cards that include a variety of data points in aggregate and by subgroup, including information on access to in advanced coursework (e.g., AP, IB, and dual enrollment).ⁱⁱ</p>	<p>District leaders may choose to analyze other data associated with advanced coursework, such as student exam participation and passage rates and use these data to target advanced coursework expansion and/or preparation for students who could benefit most.</p>
<p>SET PRIORITIES AND MAKE DECISIONS</p> 	<p>Districts are required to conduct resource reviews for schools that are identified for comprehensive support and improvement and additional targeted support and improvement.ⁱⁱⁱ</p>	<p>Resource reviews should include an audit of the available advanced coursework at identified schools, as well as understanding participation and success data. District leaders may also choose to conduct resource reviews for targeted support and improvement schools.</p>
	<p>Districts must conduct needs assessments for schools that are identified for comprehensive support and improvement.ⁱⁱⁱ</p>	<p>District leaders should include questions in needs assessments that will illuminate students' access to and performance in advanced coursework. For example, which advanced courses are offered at this school? How are students performing in those courses? District leaders may also choose to conduct needs assessments for targeted support and improvement schools.</p>
	<p>Districts must use evidence-based interventions to improve student outcomes in schools identified for comprehensive support and improvement and targeted support and improvement.^{iii,iv}</p>	<p>Research demonstrates that student outcomes improve with access to advanced coursework and district leaders can therefore pursue access to advanced coursework as an evidence-based intervention.</p>

⁹ Speroni, "Determinants of Students' Success" and Berger, et al., *Early College, Early Success*.



Using Flexible Funding

This table provides illustrative examples of the ways that district leaders can use ESSA funding to move towards increasing access to advanced coursework. The examples below are meant to elicit creative thinking about braiding funds to accomplish this equity initiative; they are not exhaustive.

OPPORTUNITY

Provide PD for AP/IB teachers	<p>TITLE II Fund AP/IB teacher training^v</p> <p>TITLE III Fund AP/IB teacher training for those who serve EL students^{vi}</p>
Reduce barriers to AP/IB coursework	<p>TITLE I Pay for exam fees for Title I schools and students^{vii}</p> <p>TITLE III Pay for exam fees for EL students^{vi}</p> <p>TITLE IV Pay for exam fees^{viii}</p>
Reduce barriers to AP/IB coursework	<p>TITLE I Pay for AP/IB course subscriptions for Title I schools and students^{vii}</p> <p>TITLE III Pay for AP/IB course subscriptions for EL students^{vi}</p> <p>TITLE IV Pay for AP/IB course subscriptions for EL students^{viii}</p>
Increase dual enrollment opportunities	<p>TITLE I Support dual enrollment for Title I schools and students^{vii}</p> <p>TITLE III Support dual enrollment for EL students^{vi}</p> <p>TITLE IV Support dual enrollment^{ix}</p>

*Title II and Title IV funding can be rolled into any other Titles, expanding the pots of money that can be spent on actions eligible for Title I and Title III funds. Titles I and III cannot be moved.



Resources

- The Education Trust, Systems for Success: Thinking Beyond Access to AP
<https://1k9gl1yevnfp2lpq1dhrqe17-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Thinking-Beyond-Access-To-AP.pdf>
- The College Board, District Leadership Playbook: Expanding Access to Advanced Placement for Students of Color
<http://www.niu.edu/ilhstocollege/resources/speed-up1/CollegeBoard.APDistrictLeadershipPlaybook.March2015.pdf>
- The Broad Foundation, The Road to Equity: Expanding AP Access and Success for African-American Students
<http://www.rebhc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/roadtoequity.pdf>



ESSA Provisions

This table provides statutory references for district leaders so that they can draw upon ESSA to validate district changes that promote increasing access to advanced coursework in the name of equity.

	ESSA STATUTORY LANGUAGE
i	<p>A special rule within ESSA’s supplement, not supplant provision changes the financial accounting methodology as follows:</p> <p>‘(1) In general.—A State educational agency or local educational agency shall use Federal funds received under this part only to supplement the funds that would, in the absence of such Federal funds, be made available from State and local sources for the education of students participating in programs assisted under this part, and not to supplant such funds.</p> <p>(2) Compliance.—To demonstrate compliance with paragraph (1), a local educational agency shall demonstrate that the methodology used to allocate State and local funds to each school receiving assistance under this part ensures that such school receives all of the State and local funds it would otherwise receive if it were not receiving assistance under this part.</p> <p>(3) Special rule.—No local educational agency shall be required to—</p> <p>(A) identify that an individual cost or service supported under this part is supplemental; or</p> <p>(B) provide services under this part through a particular instructional method or in a particular instructional setting in order to demonstrate such agency's compliance with paragraph (1).” [Sec. 1118(b)(1)-(3)].</p>

ii	<p>Each SEA and LEA must submit information to the Office of Civil Rights on “the number and percentage of students enrolled in—(bb) accelerated coursework to earn postsecondary credit while still in high school, such as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses and examinations, and dual or concurrent enrollment programs” [Sec. 1111(h)(1)(C)(viii)(II)(bb)]. Sec. 1111(h)(2)(C) outlines the minimum requirements for LEA report cards, including where they must report on the same indicators as those required in the SEA report card.</p>
iii	<p>For all schools that the state identifies as needing comprehensive support and intervention (CSI) in a district, the district must work with “stakeholders (including principals and other school leaders, teachers, and parents)” to develop a plan that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “(ii) includes evidence-based interventions; (iii) is based on a school-level needs assessment; (iv) identifies resource inequities, which may include a review of local educational agency and school-level budgeting, to be addressed through implementation of such comprehensive support and improvement plan; (v) is approved by the school, local educational agency, and State educational agency; and (vi) upon approval and implementation, is monitored and periodically reviewed by the State educational agency.” [Sec. 1111(d)(1)(B)(ii)-(vi)] <p>For schools identified for additional targeted support and improvement (ATSI), school districts must also “identify resource inequities (which may include a review of local education agency and school level budgeting)” [Sec. 1111(d)(2)(C)]. Targeted support and improvement (TSI) schools where the performance of any subgroup of students on their own would lead the state to identify the school for CSI must also conduct a resource review [Sec. 1111(d)(C)]. If these TSI schools are Title I schools, they can become CSI schools if they do not exit TSI status (exit status for TSI schools is determined by the local educational agency). And in the first year of identification (2017-2018), states “shall notify local educational agencies of any schools served by the local educational agency in which any subgroup of students, on its own, would lead to identification under [the lowest-performing 5 percent of all Title I schools] even without having those schools be identified as TSI schools first [Sec. 1111(d)(2)(D)].</p>
iv	<p>For all schools that the state identifies as needing targeted support and intervention (TSI), the school must develop a plan that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “(ii) includes evidence-based interventions;

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	<p>(iii) is approved by the local educational agency prior to implementation of such a plan;</p> <p>(iv) is monitored, upon submission and implementation, by the local educational agency; and</p> <p>(v) results in additional action following unsuccessful implementation of such plan after a number of years determined by the local educational agency.” [Sec. 1111(d)(2)(ii)-(v)]</p> <p>TSI schools where any subgroup of students on its own would lead to identification by the state as a CSI school must also conduct a resource review [Sec. 1111(d)(C)].</p>
v	<p>LEAs can use local Title II-A funds for “developing and implementing initiatives to assist in recruiting, hiring, and retaining effective teachers, particularly in low-income schools with high percentages of ineffective teachers and high percentages of students who do not meet the challenging State academic standards, to improve within-district equity in the distribution of teachers” [Sec. 2103 (b)(3) (B)], which could help to recruit educators with experience teaching Advanced Placement, early college, or other accelerated coursework.</p>
vi	<p>Individual LEAs or a consortium of LEAs are eligible to apply for grants to improve outcomes for English learners by offering academic supports, developing teachers’ competencies, and engaging parents. Eligible entities receiving funds under this grant may carry out one or more authorized activities, which includes “offering early college high school or dual or concurrent enrollment programs or courses designed to help English learners achieve success in postsecondary education” [Sec. 3115(d)(8)].</p>
vii	<p>SEAs may reserve 3 percent of Title I funds to subgrant to LEAs for Direct Student Services. If SEAs do reserve these funds, allowable LEA uses include but are not limited to “enrollment and participation in academic courses not otherwise available at a student’s school, including – (i) advanced courses” [Sec. 1003(c)(3)(A) (i)] and “activities that assist students in successfully completing postsecondary level instruction and examinations that are accepted for credit at institutions of higher education (including Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses), which may include reimbursing low-income students to cover part or all of the costs of fees for such examinations” [Sec. 1003(c)(3)(C)].</p>
viii	<p>Under Title III, individual LEAs or a consortium of LEAs are eligible to apply for grants to improve outcomes for English learners by offering academic supports,</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Continued on next page</p>

	<p>developing teachers’ competencies, and engaging parents. Eligible entities receiving funds under this grant may carry out one of more authorized activities, which includes “offering early college high school or dual or concurrent enrollment programs or courses designed to help English learners achieve success in postsecondary education” [Sec. 3115(d)(8)].</p>
ix	<p>LEAs must use a portion of their local Title IV funds for activities that support access to a well-rounded education, which may include “increasing the availability of, and enrollment in, accelerated learning courses, accelerated learning examinations, dual or concurrent enrollment programs, and early college high school courses” [Sec. 4107(a)(3)(D)(ii)].</p>