
The Power of One AP Course on College Outcomes

New research¹ shows that introducing students to the rigor of Advanced Placement courses is strongly associated with college success. Policymakers should encourage all high schools to offer at least one AP course, and all students to take at least one AP Exam.

Taking one AP course has a large payoff for college completion

Introducing students to the rigor of AP courses boosts college success. **Students who complete their first AP course are 3 percentage points more likely to graduate from college within four years. Students taking an AP Exam and scoring a 3 or higher are 6 percentage points more likely to graduate from college within four years and 8 percentage points more likely if they score 3 or higher on two AP Exams.** These gains are consistent among under-represented minority, first-generation, and lower-achieving students.

For students who took the SAT or PSAT, **an additional 17,110 students attending four-year institutions are predicted to graduate from taking their first AP.** An additional 48,128 students attending four-year institutions are predicted to graduate from earning their first AP score of 3+.²

What Policymakers Can Do

The biggest boost in college grades and on-time degree completion comes from students taking their first and second AP courses and Exams. There are several things policymakers can do to support students and educators:

- Provide funding and support to schools with no AP courses so students in all high schools have access to at least one AP course. This can include providing start-up grants and professional development to expand AP offerings quickly.
- Create incentives for students to take one AP course and Exam, such as providing state funding to cover the costs for all students' first AP Exam.
- Include students' first AP course and Exam as an indicator in state accountability systems.
- Expand the use of AP Potential to identify students ready for AP who haven't yet enrolled in an AP course.
- Promote auto-enrollment policies that enroll academically ready students into the most rigorous coursework.

¹ Beard, J. J., Hsu, J., Ewing, M., & Godfrey, K. E. (2019). Studying the relationships between the number of APs, AP Performance, and College Outcomes. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1111/emip.12295>

² Applying these estimates to the 2014 high school cohort taking the SAT or PSAT.