



State Policy Toolkit: Preparation

This is the third of five installments in the National College Access Network's State Policy Toolkit. The toolkit reflects NCAN's [Model State Policy Agenda](#), which aims to provide NCAN members and partners, particularly those in networks or coalitions, with resources to advance their state policy agenda. Moreover, the toolkit provides examples of effective policies and programs to help organizations develop and guide their state policy advocacy strategy. Each installment topic is derived from NCAN's model agenda and is categorized under either **affordability** or **talent development**. Subcategories for affordability include *need-based aid* and *funding strategies*. Beneath talent development are *preparation*, *access*, and *success*.

Preparation — NCAN's stance: Beyond financing higher education, states and statewide higher education systems should provide opportunities for all students to prepare for and succeed in higher education, particularly those who are traditionally underserved. This includes breaking down barriers within the system and building up students through equitable opportunity. Students do not enter higher education from a vacuum; they need support and opportunities. States should: (1) ensure all students have access to rigorous, credit-bearing coursework (dual/concurrent enrollment, AP, or IB) in high school; (2) provide free PSAT/SAT/ACT during the school day to all students; (3) provide school counselors with relevant, ongoing professional development in college and career readiness.

Ensure all students have access to rigorous, credit-bearing coursework (dual/concurrent enrollment, AP, or IB) in high school.

Students who enroll in higher education having had challenging coursework in high school are [more likely to succeed](#) in college than those who did not. Moreover, students entering postsecondary education with college credits therefore have fewer courses to complete in college, in turn lowering their overall cost of attendance. Thus, it is imperative that states put forth efforts to ensure that all of their students have equal access to dual/concurrent enrollment, Advanced Placement, or International Baccalaureate courses in high school.

- A June 2013 [report](#) from The Education Trust portrays the current state of inequity in terms of access to AP and IB courses. Findings show that schools that do not offer these types of courses are often relatively small and in rural and impoverished areas, and that more than 1 million students attend a high school without an AP program. The report concludes with examples of effective initiatives launched by schools and districts as well as recommendations for state and federal policymakers.
- Fully updated in 2016, this [data point](#) from the Education Commission of the States highlights the efforts made in all 50 states and the District of Columbia concerning access to rigorous and college credit-bearing coursework. Examples include state appropriations for pilot programs, the creation of online portals for students whose high school does not offer these courses, and other initiatives devised by state Departments of Education. In all, 37 states have taken aim at ensuring universal access to rigorous coursework for their students.
- In June 2014, the governor of Colorado signed into law [House Bill 14-1118](#), a measure that appropriates funding for the creation of the Advanced Placement Incentives Pilot Program for students in rural schools who participate in the National School Lunch Program. The program, which is housed within the Colorado Department of Education, designates state dollars for school-wide AP programs (including online programs if necessary), AP exam fees, and professional development for teachers to improve their AP instructional strategies.



Provide free PSAT/SAT/ACT exams during the school day to all students.

Taking college entrance exams without supplemental support requires one to independently travel to a test taking site on a non-school day and pay for the exam out-of-pocket. While both the [ACT](#) and [SAT](#) offer exam fee waivers for students who meet certain criteria, students have additional needs that should be met by states. Offering access to college entrance exams during school would lift a significant burden for traditionally underserved students.

- College Board sponsors [SAT School Day](#), the program that allows students to take the SAT cost-free during school. Primary participants in the program include states and school districts, which establish [individual contracts](#) with College Board. For SAT School Day, College Board also [covers the fees](#) for low-income students' first four score reports and college applications.
- A February 2018 [report](#) from the Brookings Institution contextualizes the need for universal access to college entrance exams, highlights several states in which the ACT or SAT is administered free of charge to students during school, and shares findings of studies that have analyzed the effectiveness of these efforts. In Michigan, for example, the percentage of high school students taking the ACT increased from 54 percent to 99 percent after this type of policy was implemented. It was particularly beneficial for low-income students; for every 1,000 low-income students who had performed well enough on the exam to attend a selective college in previous years, another 480 were uncovered as a result of universal access to the exam.
- An amendment to Section 17 of [Senate Bill 2150](#), a 2011 North Dakota measure, strengthens the requirements around college entrance exams. North Dakota had already covered the costs for 11th-graders to take the ACT during school, and this revision adds the writing portion of the exam to the sponsored expenses. Furthermore, school administrators are required to report the number of their students that took the ACT back to the state.

Provide school counselors with relevant, ongoing professional development in college and career readiness, e.g., integrate college and career readiness into graduate school counselor programs.

As of the 2014-2015 academic year, the national average student-to-school counselor [ratio](#) was a staggering 482:1, leaving school counselors with less than [20 percent](#) of their time to spend with their students to pursue postsecondary admission. This is further compounded by graduate programs that are largely inadequate; only [23 institutions](#) offer college counseling coursework, and only four of those institutions require it.

- Passed in November 2017, [House Bill 4181](#) requires the Michigan Department of Education to enforce stricter guidelines around school counselor certification. The law includes requirements that school counselors not have their credential renewed unless they have completed at least 25 hours of professional development, including instruction on the college preparation and selection process. Moreover, the law requires that a committee including college admissions professionals and financial aid officers approve the professional development standards.
- In 2012, College Board conducted a [survey](#) among 2,890 school counselors and 439 administrators on the current state of school counseling concerning efficacy, training, accountability, and resource alignment. Findings show wide agreement between the two groups that school counselors can and should lead the way in college and career readiness for high school students, and that there are current structural barriers preventing this from happening. The report concludes with examples of schools and districts that have utilized "proven and promising practices" to address these issues. Also embedded in the report are College Board's [Eight Components of College and Career Readiness Counseling](#).