



# ***In Brief***

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## ***ACADEMIC PATHWAYS THAT PROMOTE STUDENT ACCESS AND SUCCESS***

***BY EUNYOUNG KIM***

### **The APASS Initiative**

The Academic Pathways to Access and Student Success (APASS) project is a research initiative that identifies and disseminates information about existing and emerging academic pathways that extend from high school to college. Funding for this initiative was provided by the Lumina Foundation for Education ([www.luminafoundation.org](http://www.luminafoundation.org)), with additional support from the UIUC College of Education. Academic pathways are defined as boundary spanning curriculum and organizational structures that link K-12 with higher education to facilitate student transition to college. Community colleges enroll the greatest number of underserved student populations of all types of higher education in the United States and are, therefore, a linchpin in assisting students to make a successful transition from high school to college.

### **Nine Academic Pathways**

Drawing upon the results of a 50-state survey, an extensive review of literature and consultation with national experts, the APASS project documented implementation of nine academic pathways in the United States:

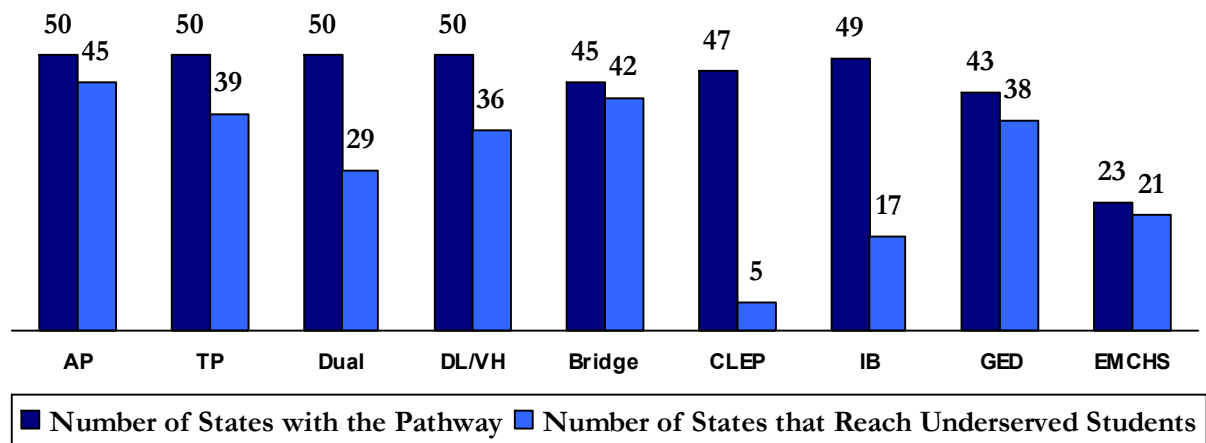
- Advanced Placement (AP)
- Bridge programs
- College Level Examination Program (CLEP)
- Distance learning/Virtual high schools and colleges (DL/VH)
- Dual credit and dual enrollment
- GED programs that bridge to college
- International Baccalaureate (IB)
- Early and Middle College High School (EMCHS)
- Tech Prep and College Tech Prep (TP)

### **Results of the National Inventory**

Academic pathway models and approaches are growing throughout the United States, both in terms of the number of educational organizations involved and the number of students enrolled. Of the nine selected academic pathways displayed in Figure 1, the study indicated that AP, dual credit and dual enrollment, tech prep or college tech prep, and distance learning/virtual high schools and colleges were implemented at the local level in all 50 states. These four pathways were followed by IB, identified in 49 states; CLEP, recognized within 47 states; bridge programs, evident in 45 states; GED, found in 43 states; and early or middle college

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high schools, identified in 23 states. Of all pathways, AP was mentioned by the largest number of states as a curricular pathway to reach underserved students, followed by bridge programs and tech prep. The early or middle college high school pathway model, although evident in fewer states than other more established pathways, was almost always focused on underserved, at risk student groups as the primary student population, with the goal of helping these students to graduate from high school and pursue further education by providing a personalized learning environment and more rigorous curricula.



**Figure 1. Number of States with Pathways and that Reach Underserved Students**

### Other Pathways and Approaches

Besides the nine academic pathways, the 50-state survey revealed more than 250 incidences in which state officials mentioned other forms of academic pathways that are being implemented within their states to promote college access and success. These initiatives were cited because they were thought to represent valuable means of enhancing curriculum and instruction; improving assessment, college readiness, and standards alignment; increasing career pathway options; extending and deepening school reforms; or offering mentoring and student supports. Some of these models and related examples include:

- Career pathway models – career pathways, career academies
- School reforms – charter schools, small schools, High Schools That Work (HSTW)
- Mentor and support models – GEAR UP, TRIO, Upward Bound
- Alignment, assessment, and standards-related initiatives

### States’ Priorities on Pathways

Results of the APASS study indicate that the dual credit and dual enrollment pathway, followed by AP, is being combined with online and distance technology to reach a wide spectrum of student populations. Interestingly, both pathway models represent new trends accompanying the advance of technology. Some states have begun to implement online AP or dual credit courses to reduce costs and broaden the choice of students who can take advantage of such offerings. We predict this blending of pathways will continue to expand with more states and local institutions supporting integrated approaches as a way of broadening their academic offerings for underserved students.

Of the pathways present across the states, dual credit/dual enrollment, AP, and tech prep were considered to be the highest priority pathways of many states; dual credit/dual enrollment was recognized as the top priority by 17 states, AP was seen as top by 12 states, and tech prep was rated the top priority by 12 states. While officials in 19 states cited an emphasis on a particular pathway, many other state officials expressed a preference that

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multiple pathways must exist in order to provide the necessary variety of educational opportunities tailored to the diverse student populations' needs.

### **The Role of Community College in Promoting Access to College**

Community colleges play an important role in expanding access to college by enrolling underserved students, including underrepresented racial and minority groups, low income, first generation to attend college, and students under-prepared for college-level work. With growing emphasis on high skill development and greater demand for postsecondary education (Rosenbaum, 2001), community colleges provide a wide array of services that help students bridge the gap from high school to college and provide assistance towards success in college (Orr & Bragg, 2001).

Multiple methods for easing the transition from high school to college are facilitated through an increasing number of partnerships between community colleges and school districts. One pattern of partnership is found in the tech prep 2+2+2 model, which is a joint venture among high schools, two-year colleges, and four-year colleges or universities. An example is the Achieving College Education (ACE) program in Arizona, a collaborative transfer bridge partnership between Pima and Santa Cruz County school districts, Pima Community College, and the University of Arizona (<http://www.pima.edu/kidsandteens/Ace.shtml>). It is designed to increase high school graduation and college attendance rates, and it provides ongoing support and encouragement for at-risk students from their sophomore year of high school until they graduate from the university.

Another example is the Owensboro Discover College in Owensboro Community and Technical College (Kentucky). Discover College is an umbrella term that embraces credit-based transition programs and increases academic readiness through early exposure to college, and thus high school students are able to learn about college while they are attending high school. This model was created through a community-based P-16 initiative to promote college access and educational attainment (<http://www.octc.ketcs.edu/Discover>).

### **Lessons Learned from the APASS Study**

Promoting access to college is a widely accepted educational goal in the United States. Results of the APASS study suggest that much work lies ahead if the pathways, either individually or in concert with one another, are to reach greater numbers of underserved students. Drawing upon the recent APASS project publication and conference presentation, several implications directed towards promoting college access are suggested (Bragg, in press; Bragg, Kim, & Barnett, in press; Kim, Bragg, & Rubin, 2006):

- A single pathway cannot meet the needs of all diverse student populations who desire and deserve the opportunity to attend college. Instead of promoting any one particular model, several states are thinking strategically by identifying multiple pathways to address the needs of their varied student populations, which enhances access and opportunity for underserved students.
  - Across the various academic pathways, a linkage between high schools and community colleges is increasingly prominent. While most academic pathways are being implemented initially at the secondary level, community colleges are actively involved in creating collaborative partnerships with various educational sectors.
  - Partnerships involving high schools and colleges need to move from good intention to being firmly embedded in organizational and curricular structures that span all levels of the educational system, implying that leaders and faculty need to be engaged and rewarded for participating in reform.
  - As academic pathways evolve, more data driven analysis is needed to better understand how they impact high school student retention and preparation for college, how they facilitate the high school-to-college transition, and how they affect student performance and persistence in higher education.
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- Pathway models from secondary to postsecondary education should focus not only academics but also on careers. College attendance and graduation are not the end goals for any transition programs, as career focused pathway models that end in employment are ultimately important.
  - Support services geared toward successful student transition are essential, including tailoring methods for high school and collegiate guidance personnel to work collaboratively.
  - On-going dialogue between the secondary and postsecondary levels is necessary to facilitate student transition from high school to college and success in college.

For additional information, please visit the project website at <http://www.apass.uiuc.edu>

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