

# Course Access: Providing Equitable Access to High-Quality Learning Opportunities

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## What is Course Access?

Course Access provides public school students with expanded course offerings across learning environments from diverse, accountable providers. It is a statewide program through which students can gain equitable access to a variety of courses in a programmatic effort to increase access, quality and equity in public education.

Students and parents can choose from a diverse online catalog of courses. Each course must pass the state's quality review process to ensure that it aligns with state academic standards and meets quality standards. The catalog can include online, blended, face-to-face, and career/technical courses. Student reviews and academic performance data should be available for each provider in the online catalog. School counselors work with students to identify courses that are academically appropriate and logistically feasible.

Course access offers students the opportunity to take courses that might not be available at their school. Other advantages include personalization, new learning pathways, flexible time and place, acceleration, credit recovery, and continuity of learning.



For more information,  
download the report  
*Course Access: Equitable  
Opportunities for College and  
Career Ready Students:*  
[bit.ly/inacol-course-access](http://bit.ly/inacol-course-access)

## The Opportunity Gap

Today, far too many students, especially those from traditionally underserved backgrounds, do not have access to all of the courses they need to be prepared for college and careers. Public schools may not offer a full array of courses due to a lack of resources, qualified staff, or sufficient student demand for a course.

According to the US Department of Education:<sup>1</sup>

- Only 50% of US high schools offer calculus and only 63% offer physics.
- Black and Latino students make up 37% of high school students but only account for 18% of students passing an AP exam.
- Amongst high schools with the highest percentage of black and Latino students, one quarter do not offer algebra II, and one third do not offer chemistry.

This unacceptable opportunity gap means too many students are graduating from high school unprepared.

## Opportunity Gap Statistics

Of US high schools, only

 **50%** offer calculus

 **63%** offer physics

In US high schools with the highest percent of black and Latino students,

 **25%** do not offer algebra II

 **33%** do not offer chemistry

1. US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (March 2014). *Civil Rights Data Collection Data Snapshot: College and Career Readiness*. Retrieved from <http://ocrdata.ed.gov/Downloads/CrDC-College-and-Career-readiness-Snapshot.pdf>.

## Course Access: A Promising Solution

Course Access provides an incredible opportunity to end—once and for all—the inequitable barriers students face to accessing high-quality college- and career-ready coursework.

Policymakers can help to close opportunity and achievement gaps by supporting the development of course access policies in their states.

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## What are the Elements of a Course Access Program?

The following table shows key elements of a Course Access program.

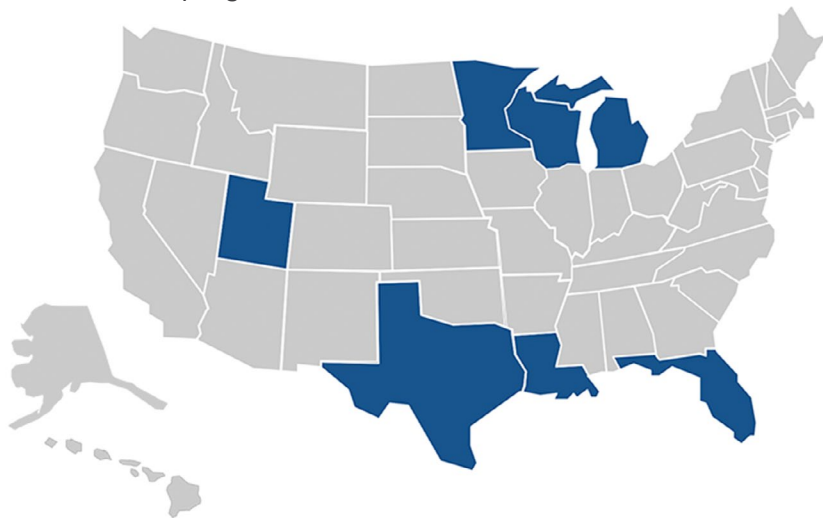
**Table: Key Elements of a Course Access Program**

EQUITABLE ACCESS	SUSTAINABLE AND PERFORMANCE-BASED FUNDING	A FOCUS ON QUALITY	STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All public school students in the state are eligible to access courses in multiple modalities from a wide range of providers.</li> <li>No district can deny a student’s enrollment in a course without a legitimate, educational reason.<sup>2</sup></li> <li>Providers must comply with federal and state disability laws, and materials must be accessible to all learners.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Funding covers the cost of delivering high-quality content and instruction.</li> <li>Funding is sustainable because it follows each student—at the course level—to the course provider.</li> <li>Provider payments can be tied to student outcomes, with the goal of improving student achievement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The state evaluates providers and courses for alignment with state academic standards and nationally-recognized quality standards (e.g. <a href="#">iNACOL National Standards for Quality Online Courses</a>).</li> <li>The state makes data on course and provider quality publicly available to students and parents.</li> <li>The state enforces rigorous, ongoing provider accountability.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The state ensures that students, families, teachers, and counselors understand the opportunities available within the program through proactive communications.</li> </ul>

2. E.g. A student with no prior knowledge of Mandarin Chinese wishes to register for Mandarin Chinese III.

## Which States are Implementing a Course Access Program?

Florida, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Texas, Utah, and Wisconsin have Course Access programs.

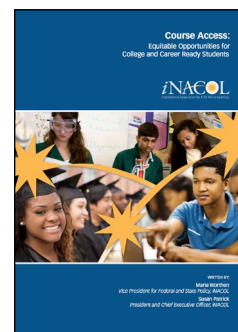


*Florida, Louisiana, Michigan and Texas approve and evaluate course providers in accordance with the [iNACOL National Standards for Quality Online Courses](#).*

All of these states allow students to access supplemental courses through a statewide online course catalog and all have funding that follows the student at the course level to course providers.<sup>3</sup> These states base funding on successful student outcomes, such as course completion. Florida, Louisiana, Michigan and Texas approve and evaluate course providers in accordance with the [iNACOL National Standards for Quality Online Courses](#).

## Learn More

The iNACOL report, [Course Access: Equitable Opportunities for College and Career Ready Students](#), provides more information on Course Access, including key program elements, state policies, and model legislative principles. If you are a policymaker wishing to advance Course Access in your state, contact the [iNACOL Center for Policy Advocacy](#) here. Learn more on the [iNACOL website](#) and [blog](#), and [follow us on twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [LinkedIn](#).



3. Louisiana's Course Access program funding structure is based on an appropriation that allocates money to schools for supplemental courses. This structure was implemented after the Louisiana Supreme Court struck down a funding mechanism where funding was paid directly to course providers.



The mission of the International Association for K–12 Online Learning (iNACOL) is to ensure all students have access to a world-class education and quality blended and online learning opportunities that prepare them for a lifetime of success. iNACOL is a non-profit organization focused on research; developing policy for student-centered education to ensure equity and access; developing quality standards for emerging learning models using online, blended, and competency-based education; and supporting the ongoing professional development of classroom, school, district and state leaders for new learning models. Learn more at [www.inacol.org](http://www.inacol.org).