

15% of students passed an AP exam in 2006

Only 10% passed in 2000, report says

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USA TODAY

A larger, more racially diverse pool of public high school students in the 2006 graduating class took Advanced Placement courses compared with the class of 2000, and more passed a standardized exam in at least one subject, a report says.

Nearly 15% of 2006 public high school graduates earned a passing grade on an AP exam, compared with 14% in 2005 and 10% in the class of 2000, the report says. It was released Tuesday.

Still, racial gaps persist. Black and Native American students remain "significantly under-represented" in such classrooms, and exam scores for black, Latino and Native American students tended on average to be lower than those of white and Asian-American students.

"Educators, administrators and policymakers deserve tremendous credit for enabling a wider segment of our nation's youth than ever before to achieve success

on an AP exam," says Gaston Caperton, president of the non-profit College Board, which administers the program. "We must do more to ensure that every student receives adequate preparation for rigorous courses like AP."

The AP program, which was created more than 50 years ago to help bright high school students get a jump-start on college by taking college-level courses, has also in recent years been viewed as evidence of rigor in the high school curriculum.



Caperton: Hails students' diversity.

A hallmark is the program's AP exam, a national standardized test that is administered for each subject by the College Board. Students who score a 3 (out of 5) or higher are considered to have demonstrated mastery of the subject, and many colleges award credit based on a student's scores.

The program offers exams in 37 subject areas, the most popular of which include U.S. history, English, calculus and biology. From 2000 to 2006, all 50 states and the District of Columbia saw an increase in the percentage of high school graduates who had earned 3 or higher on an AP exam while in high school, the report says.

The program, in which classroom teachers follow a locally developed curriculum

that is approved by the College Board, is especially popular in suburban schools. Many teachers receive special training. But expansion is underway in a number of states, the report said. Beginning this fall, Arkansas public schools must make at least three AP courses available. Similar legislation was passed last November in West Virginia. A number of states provide virtual-learning opportunities to students who live in remote areas.

Other details from the report:

► Last year, 12,037 of the nation's more than 22,000 public secondary schools offered at least one AP course, up 5% from 2000. (About 3,085 non-public schools offered the program, up 10 schools from 2000, but data on those schools are not included in the report.) Schools on average offer eight AP courses.

► About 24% of last year's estimated 2.7 million public high school graduates participated in AP programs while in high school, up from 16% for the class of 2000.

► Black students make up 13.7% of the total student population but account for 6.9% of exam takers, and Native Americans represent 1.1% of the student population and 0.6% of exam takers.

► Latino students make up 14% of both populations but "remain under-represented in AP programs in many states." Only 13 states had achieved equity in the representation of Latino students.

Top performers

States with the greatest percentage of graduating public school seniors last year who scored a 3 or higher (passing grade) on an AP exam while in high school:

New York	22.7%
Maryland	22.0%
Utah	20.8%
Virginia	20.7%
California	20.1%
Massachusetts	19.8%
Florida	19.6%
Connecticut	19.4%
North Carolina	18.0%
Colorado	17.9%

Source: College Board, Advanced Placement Report to the Nation

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