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## **Report: High school academic rigor would help address growing Mass. college grad shortage**

*Mass Insight study calls for expanding advanced coursework in high school to address workforce need*

BOSTON – Aug. 28 – Massachusetts' economy, facing a severe shortage of college graduates, would benefit from the expansion of rigorous high school coursework that prepares students for success in college and beyond, according to a new study by Mass Insight Education & Research. The changing demographics in Massachusetts add urgency to the problem as the population grows with workers less likely to attend college, creating an imperative to increase the availability of college-level coursework and other rigorous high school curricula.

The report, [\*Beyond College Credit: Leveraging AP as an Effective Workforce Strategy\*](#), authored by Dr. Dana Ansel, pinpoints the connection between rigorous high school coursework and college success, citing the research of Clifford Adelman and other researchers. High-quality college-preparatory programs in urban high schools can both improve educational outcomes and increase earnings. Ansel argues that making rigorous coursework, such as Advanced Placement classes, available to more students, paired with additional encouragement and support, will help Massachusetts maintain its edge as a highly educated state with a highly skilled workforce.

Yet, despite Massachusetts' status as a highly educated state, Ansel frames a challenging picture for the Massachusetts economy. By 2020, 72 percent of Massachusetts' jobs will require training beyond high school, with 94 percent of the state's fastest growing STEM-related jobs requiring more than a high school degree.

Massachusetts risks leaving itself vulnerable to a talent shortage by not providing more students with academic potential the opportunity to succeed in rigorous courses in high schools across the state, said Susan F. Lusi, president and CEO of Mass Insight. "Rigorous academics should be seen as a fundamental part of the workforce strategy to prepare for the Commonwealth's pressing

talent needs. We need to tap into the potential of many more high school students – students who currently don't have access to advanced academics such as AP courses,” Lusi said.

The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education recognizes the importance of rigorous coursework in high school, recently making advanced coursework completion part of its new school and district accountability system. The Legislature and the Baker Administration also support efforts to expand AP STEM and English and early college high school partnerships.

“Although Massachusetts has the nation’s best-educated workforce, educational attainment is highly uneven,” said Ansel. “There are many ways to instill more rigorous coursework in high school, and one of the most proven and effective is Advanced Placement, which offers a national framework and is externally graded. There are many students ready to step up and be challenged. Expansion of AP ultimately would pay dividends to the Massachusetts economy.”

Among the report’s key recommendations:

- Support more Advanced Placement access within schools. Open access, combined with student and instructional support, in AP in high schools has been shown to be successful.
- Better align the AP program with higher education. College credit standards for AP coursework are inconsistent, especially in Massachusetts’s public higher education system, where what counts for credit varies from campus to campus and is not transparent.
- Identify unmet student need in Massachusetts. It has been estimated that there are 600,000 students nationwide who are “missing” from AP coursework.

Since Mass Insight began its AP STEM and English program, it has reached over 23,000 students throughout high schools in Massachusetts. The program helps expand or jump start AP classes at high schools looking to provide more opportunity for students, particularly underserved students. The net result has been higher academic achievement and better preparedness for college, said Mass Insight’s Lusi.

An analysis of six cohorts of participating schools over five years reveals that the AP STEM and English program is increasing college success for minority (Latino/black/African American) students: 77% of minority AP students who participated in Mass Insight’s program have gone on to college. Of those students, 81% have graduated with a college degree, or continue to be on track for college graduation.

Read the report [here](#).

#### *About Mass Insight Education & Research*

Founded in Boston in 1997, Mass Insight Education & Research is a national leader in accelerating student learning and shrinking achievement gaps. We help school systems develop and implement cost-effective school improvement solutions. Our field-tested approach starts with asking questions to understand context and conditions. Leveraging strengths, we build coherence, capacity, and networks to accelerate learning. Our performance improvement results are among the most promising in the field of public education today. For more information, visit [www.massinsight.org](http://www.massinsight.org).