Aspiration to Opportunity Coalition

Automatic Enrollment: The Case for Michigan's Students

What it is

In many states, including Michigan, getting into an Advanced Placement (AP) class, a dual-enrollment course, or another advanced option usually means someone has to notice a student, nominate them, and walk them through an application.

Automatic enrollment flips this model: Any student who hits a readiness bar, whether that's a state test score or strong grades in the prerequisite class before it, is placed straight into the next more advanced course. There is no application and no need to seek approval. Importantly, families can still opt out, **but the default is yes**.

Benefits for students

A significant body of research and the experiences of students and teachers here in Michigan show how postsecondary-focused courses benefit students:

- According to researchers at Columbia University, "There is strong evidence that DE [dual enrollment] improves academic outcomes for students, including completing high school, enrolling in college, and completing college degrees."
- "Studies confirm that IB DP [International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme] graduates outperform the national average in college enrollment, persistence, and graduation rates."—Lansing School District
- "At a time when our 9th-12th grade student population is decreasing across the state of Michigan, including in Washtenaw County, our CTE enrollment has doubled in the past four years. Despite adding numerous programs through one-time grant funding and public-private partnerships, we cannot keep up with student demand."—Dr. Ryan Rowe, Washtenaw ISD CTE Director.
- "Before the AP Seminar, I was never a reader. I was never good at writing, and that (course) just brought me into reading and writing. It changed my perspective."—Oscar Sanchez, Northview High School, Michigan, in MLive

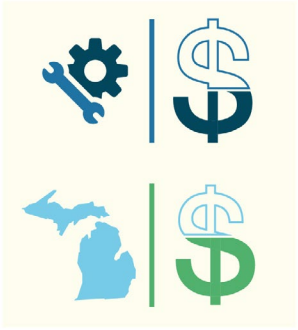
Context in Michigan

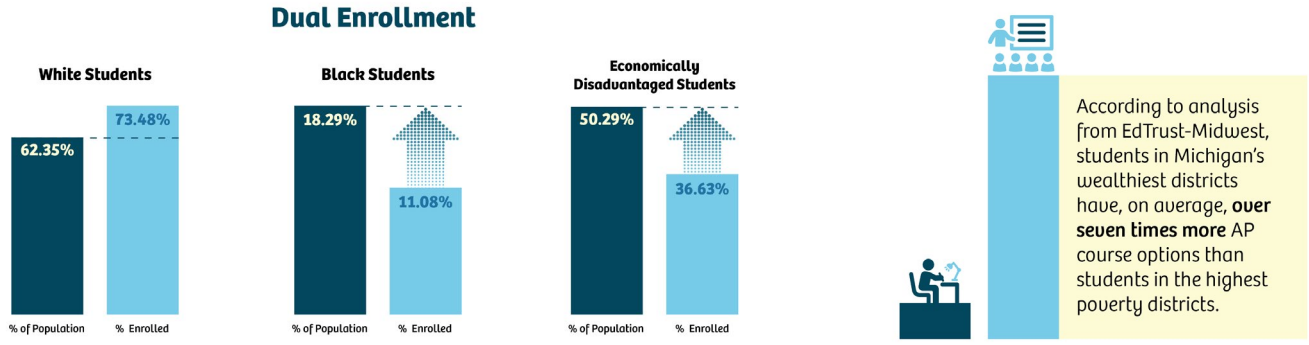
To date, Michigan has no statewide automatic enrollment policy. Access to AP, dual enrollment, and other postsecondary-focused courses depends on where a student happens to go to school and, often, who happens to notice them, **which means students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and students in special education are disproportionately left out.**

According to MI School Data, **Black students are 18.29% of Michigan's student population, but only represent 10.49% of students enrolled in Early Middle College.**



This is an economic issue, too. Economically disadvantaged students make up only **39.87% of students enrolled** in Career and Technical Education (CTE) classes, even though they are **50.29% of the overall student population.**





Fortunately, there is a foundation in place. The recently passed FY27 School Aid Budget gave schools dedicated dual enrollment dollars for the first time, so districts no longer have to pull that money from their general fund. Pairing an automatic enrollment system with continued, dedicated grant funding would let Michigan turn that budget win into a statewide guarantee for all students.

Case study: Washington State

Washington's policy started small and local. In 2010, Federal Way School District adopted automatic enrollment on its own. **As a result, the share of students of color in advanced courses jumped from 35 percent to 61 percent in a single year and pass rates stayed high at 94 percent, 10 points above the district average.**

That local proof point moved the legislature. In 2013, lawmakers passed a law encouraging districts to adopt automatic enrollment and funded the startup costs: teacher training, technology, transportation, books, and fees. By 2019, Washington became the first state in the country to require that any student meeting or exceeding state standards on the 8th-grade or high school ELA or math assessment is automatically enrolled in advanced math, English, and science. The law also stipulates that districts must notify families of their student's opt-in and can apply for one-time grants to build out capacity. *Source:* EdTrust

Case study: Texas

Texas passed Senate Bill 2124 in 2023, "which requires all Texas school districts to automatically enroll students scoring in the top 40 percent on 5th-grade math assessments into advanced coursework. Since then, **the gap in Algebra I completion between high-performing Black and white students in Central Texas has narrowed by 91 percent."**
Source: Strive Together

Aspiration to Opportunity Coalition Recommendations

Modeled on legislation from other states, **Michigan should include in the FY28 budget a competitive grant program for a limited number of districts committed to implementing automatic enrollment well.** Building in financial incentives closes the gap where a school wants to serve more students but doesn't have the staff, training, or partnerships to do it.

Specifically, the coalition is asking legislators to:

- Include funds for a limited number of districts to implement automatic enrollment policies, prioritizing districts in Opportunity Index bands 4, 5, and 6.
- Modeled on legislation from Washington state, ensure that half of the funds going to each district are available to cover costs associated with expanding advanced courses (curriculum, technology, teacher training, technical assistance, etc). Reserve the other half as an incentive award for each student who is: economically disadvantaged, an English Learner, or a student with a disability who successfully passes Algebra I by the end of 8th grade; earns dual, concurrent, or articulated high school and college credit; scores a 3 or higher on an AP exam; earns a credential of value; or achieves a score of four or higher on an International Baccalaureate exam.
- Begin automatically enrolling students beginning in 8th grade at the latest.
- Hear directly from Teach Plus Michigan Policy Fellows, all current classroom teachers, about what an automatic enrollment policy would mean for their students. Contact Teach Plus Michigan Executive Director Ben Locke at blocke@teachplus.org.